COUNTRY LIFE

EVERY WEEK

JANUARY 28, 2026

It smells like spring

Follow the fragrances of the seasons

Ever so 'umble: why we should eat offal

'I was utterly bewitched': a lifetime in roses

Barn owls, beautiful bathrooms and Bond

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Knight Frank

REF: WIN012418583

AMPORT, HAMPSHIRE

A substantial country house set in about 15.68 acres on the edge of this peaceful and beautiful hamlet.

4 bedrooms | 4 bathrooms | 5 reception rooms | Clock House with 1 bedroom flat | Extensive garaging | Greenhouse | Outbuildings
Courtyard garden | Landscaped garden | Woodland | Pasture | Paddocks
Grateley 1.6 miles (London Waterloo from 75 minutes) | Farleigh School 3.1 miles

Guide price £2,850,000

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01962 677234
george.clarendon@knightframk.com

Strutt & Parker
01962 418196
lindsay.johnn@struttandparker.com

MICHAEL GRAHAM

Great Doddington, Northamptonshire

Guide Price: £2,000,000

12 Bedrooms | **6** Reception Rooms | **9** Bathrooms | **B** EPC

A period farmhouse, cottage, and barn conversion arranged around a central courtyard with 2.6 acres of land including a vineyard. All three properties are self-contained and offer versatile accommodation approaching 8,500 sq. ft. Outbuildings include a former milking parlour currently used for wine production, and the garden has views over the vineyard and countryside beyond.

Michael Graham Northampton
Richard Michalski **01604 611011**

Michael Graham London
Sophie Cavell-Taylor **020 8092 1888**

Knight Frank

REF: EXE012160065

TOPSHAM, DEVON

On the market for the first time, a striking contemporary waterfront home with breathtaking views and sensitive architectural design.

4 bedrooms | 3 bathrooms | Open plan living area | Lift | Integral garage | Parking & turntable | Wrap-around terraces | Landscaped gardens
Home automation | PV panels | Battery storage | EV charging | EPC B | Freehold | Council Tax band G
Topsham Station 0.6 miles | Exeter City Centre 4.7 miles

Offers in excess of £3,000,000

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020 7861 1717
hamish.humfrey@knightfrank.com

Knight Frank Exeter
01392 423111
louise.glanville@knightfrank.com

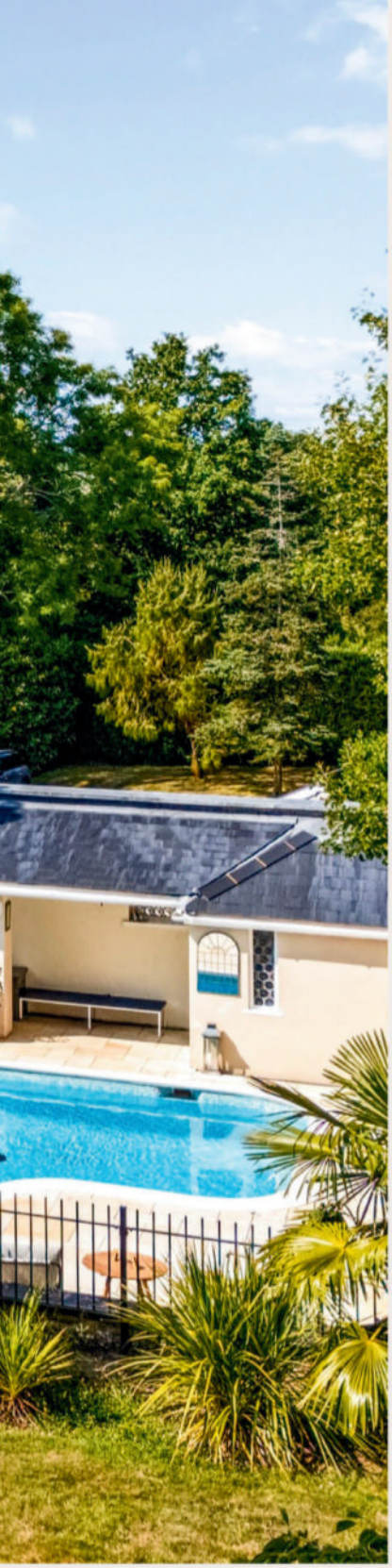
GEORGIAN ELEGANCE

7 4 3 | 7,912 sq ft

Nr. Horsham, West Sussex. Guide £3.25 million

A beautiful Grade II listed country house offering nearly 8,000 sq ft of accommodation in a rural yet accessible setting. The property includes 3 elegant reception rooms, 7 spacious bedrooms, and 4 bathrooms, along with an integral annexe. Beautiful parkland-style gardens frame a secure south-facing swimming pool area, with paddocks extending beyond. This distinguished home combines period charm with modern comfort, creating an exceptional opportunity for country living in a picturesque and private location.

Freehold | Council Tax Band = H | EPC = E



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Rohan Vines

Savills Haywards Heath
01444 446 000
rvines@savills.com

savills

Wiltshire, Malmesbury

A handsome and substantial country house with elegant accommodation, beautiful gardens and top-class equestrian facilities

Sherston: 1.3 miles, M4 (J17): 5.5 miles, Malmesbury: 6.5 miles, Chippenham: 9.5 miles (London Paddington 69 mins), Central London: 100 miles
Hall | Drawing room | Billiards room | Family room | Garden room | Playroom | Study | Kitchen/breakfast room | Sun room | Gym
3 Cloakrooms | Principal bedroom with dressing room and ensuite bathroom | 8 Further bedrooms (2 ensuite) | 4 Bathrooms | Living area
Second kitchen | 3-Bedroom lodge house | Club House with kitchen, bedroom and bathroom | Comprehensive equestrian facilities including indoor and outdoor arenas, polo yard, stable barn and gallop | Swimming pool with pool house | Tennis court | Garaging | Gardens and grounds
About 61 acres

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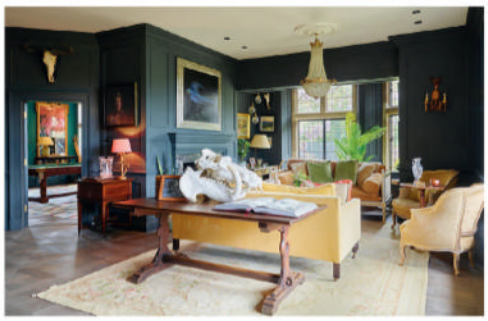
Guide Price £9,500,000



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Alex Collins
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aco@sothebysrealty.co.uk

Berkshire, Sunningdale

Guide Price £3,850,000

&

A substantial 6-bedroom home, set within beautiful gardens, in a highly-desirable location

M3 (J3): 4 miles, M25 (J12): 11 miles, Ascot: 3 miles, Windsor 8: miles, Heathrow Airport (Terminal 5): 9.4 miles, Central London: 27 miles
Reception hall | Open-plan drawing room/dining room | Sitting room | Study | Garden room | Kitchen/breakfast/family room
Utility room | Triple garage with EV charger | Principal bedroom with dressing room and 2 ensuite bathrooms
5 Further bedrooms (3 ensuite) | Family bathroom | EPC Rating D

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daniel.burstow@struttandparker.com

STRUTT&PARKER
BNP PARIBAS GROUP

Berkshire, Ascot

Guide Price £5,000,000

&

An imposing modern family residence, set within landscaped gardens and situated in one of Ascot's premier roads

M3 (J3): 3.4 miles, Ascot Station: 1 mile (Waterloo 57 mins), Windsor: 8 miles, Heathrow Airport (T5): 11.5 miles, Central London: 31 miles
Impressive galleried reception hall | Drawing room | Dining room | Family room | Study | Games room/bar | Gym | Kitchen/breakfast/sitting room
2nd Kitchen | Utility room | Boot room | Principal bedroom suite | 2 Guest suites | 2 Further bedrooms (both with ensuite bathrooms) | Triple garage
with annexe above | Ample parking | Landscaped gardens | Outbuilding/summerhouse with covered BBQ area | NHBC Warranty | EPC Rating B

About 0.65 acre

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JSA: Knight Frank
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01344 293 140
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Leicestershire, Lubenham

Guide Price £1,950,000

&

A Queen Anne farmhouse with coach house, equestrian facilities and land

Market Harborough Station (mainline): 2 miles (London St Pancras 58 mins), Leicester: 16 miles, Uppingham: 18 miles, Oakham: 22 miles

Hall | Drawing room | Dining room | Sun room | Kitchen/breakfast room | Pantry | Coach house with office

Principal bedroom with ensuite bathroom | 5 Further bedrooms | 2 Further bathrooms | Garaging

Stables and manège | Swimming pool | Gardens and grounds

About 8.7 acres

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STRUTT&PARKER
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West Berkshire, Brightwalton

Guide Price £4,250,000

&

A fine unlisted country house of Georgian origins set in approximately 35 acres of rolling countryside, with separate cottage, studio flat and barn

Wantage: 7 miles, Newbury: 9 miles, Didcot Parkway Station: 12 miles (London Paddington 40 mins), Hungerford: 10 miles, Heathrow: 51 miles

Hall | Drawing room | Sitting room | Study | Conservatory | Kitchen/breakfast room | Office | Cellar | Principal bedroom with dressing room and bathroom | 4 Further bedrooms (3 ensuite) | Family bathroom | Studio flat | Cottage with 2 bedrooms

Indoor swimming pool and gym | Tennis court | Gardens and grounds | Pastureland | Outbuildings

About 34.7 acres

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OnTheMarket

Oundle, Northamptonshire £595,000

Superb malthouse conversion with private, south-facing garden, summerhouse and 3/4 bedrooms, in a historic, riverside market town.

Contact 01234 671807

Garmston, Shropshire £845,000 Guide price

Beautifully presented 4/5 bedroom family haven with no onward chain, boasting jaw-dropping panoramic views of the Shropshire countryside.

Contact 01743 534852

Heathfield, East Sussex £2,400,000

An impressive gated farmhouse set in 21 acres with gardens, woodland and outstanding equestrian facilities, blending rural charm with refined modern living.

Contact 01323 916609

Godstone, Surrey £950,000 Guide price

A mid-terrace family home offering generous accommodation and equestrian facilities. Set within an attractive courtyard setting, with far-reaching countryside views.

Contact 01403 453768

Osmington, Dorset £595,000 Guide price

A unique home with stunning country and coastal views, offers generous flexible accommodation, rural yet close to Weymouth and Dorchester.

Contact 01305 835300

Winsford, Somerset £1,300,000 Guide price

A stunning six-bed Edwardian home offering a harmonious blend of period features and timeless design, set in beautiful gardens and grounds.

Contact 01643 238968

Tivetshall St. Margaret, Norfolk £2,000,000

Grade II Listed, late 17th century barn conversion with green credentials, set in four acres with southerly aspect two cottages and barn.

Contact 01603 661199

Ashbourne, Derbyshire £575,000

A two-bedroom detached home in 5.18 acres plot with a further 6.87 acres available. Enjoys a spacious dining kitchen, attached garage and barn with conversion potential.

Contact 01335 671950

Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire £625,000

A generously proportioned four-bedroom detached family home located in a sought-after residential close, within walking distance of Chipping Norton town centre.

Contact 01608 503956

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Upper Broughton, Nottinghamshire — **£600,000** Offers over

A charming three-bedroom detached period home occupying a generous plot, enjoying far-reaching views across open countryside.

Contact 01664 518924

York, North Yorkshire — **£925,000** Guide price

Regency Townhouse in York area. Conservation area with annexe, parking and two courtyard gardens, convenient for railway station.

Contact 01904 595677

Lewes, East Sussex — **£1,250,000** Offers in the region of

A detached single storey house in a spectacular position, with downland views and large garden with outbuildings. Enjoys three bedrooms with two ensuite shower rooms.

Contact 01273 083818

Newfargie, Perthshire — **£875,000** Offers over

A delightful, modernised, country house within a beautiful walled garden enjoying a superb location, woodland and a paddock.

Contact 01738 301815

Thame, Oxfordshire — **£1,350,000** Guide price

One of the town's most iconic homes, with six bedrooms, enjoying a wonderful position overlooking the town's cricket ground and St Mary's Church.

Contact 01844 447905

Hunton, Kent — **£1,400,000** Guide price

Stunning character farmhouse and separate annexe including a delightful thatched double garage and set in wonderful gardens of over 3 acres.

Contact 01580 468937

Headcorn, Kent — **£900,000** Guide price

Grade II listed, 16th century house, rich in period features including original beams, windows, fireplaces and ornate plasterwork.

Contact 01233 526919

Branscombe, Devon — **£1,500,000** Guide price

Grade II listed country house with cottage, outbuildings and 4.13 acres, set elevated in East Devon with coastal views.

Contact 01404 228969

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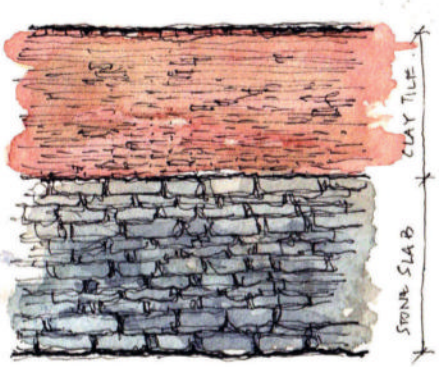

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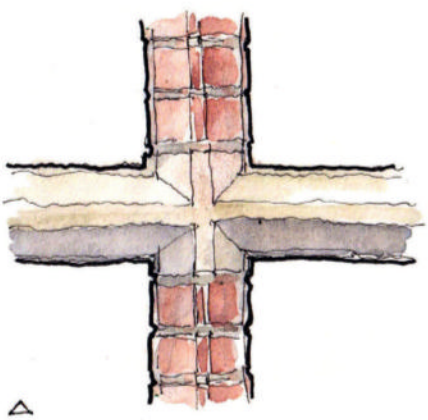

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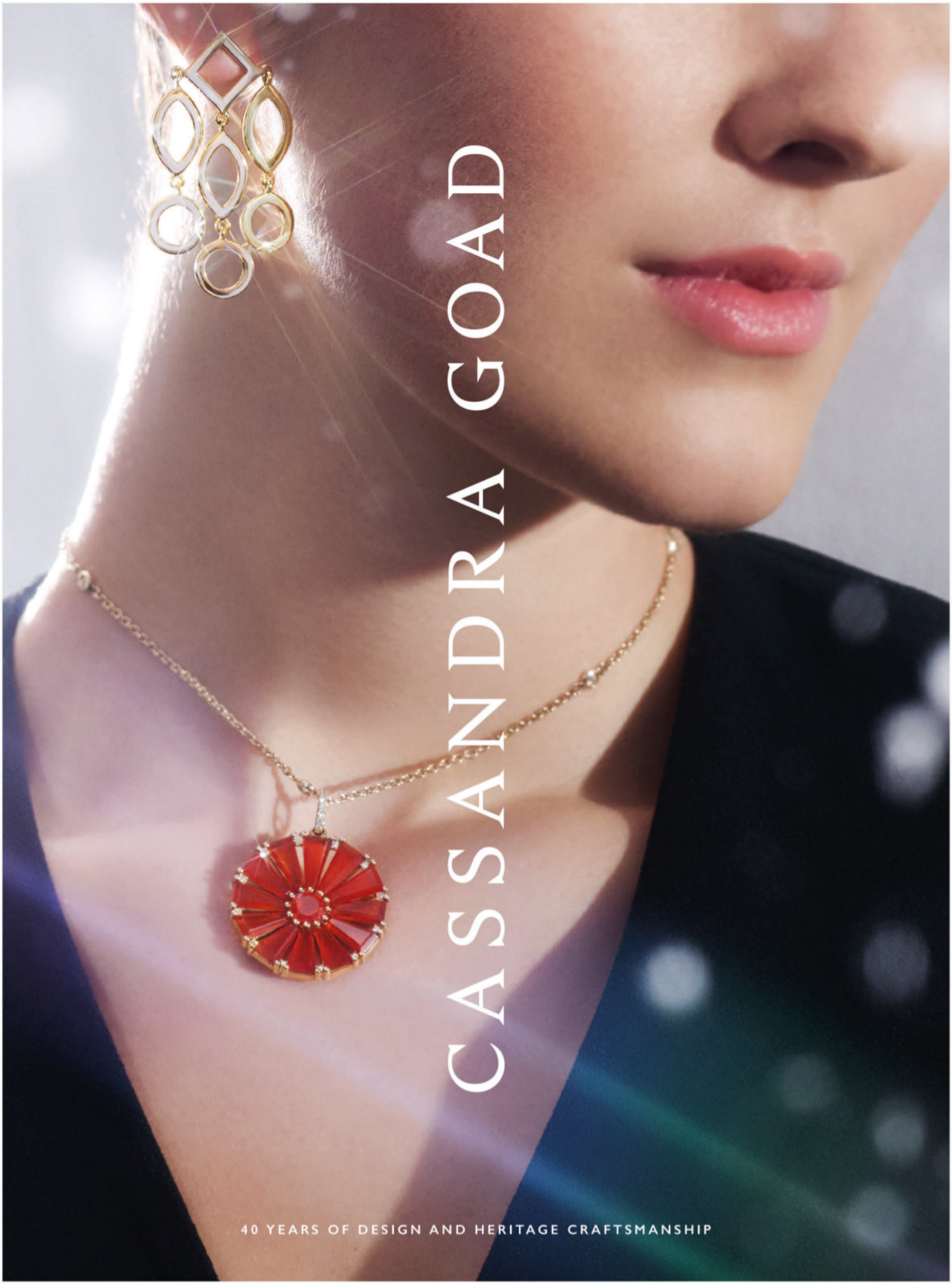
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COUNTRY LIFE

VOL CCXXVI NO 5, JANUARY 28, 2026

Miss Jemima Gray

Jemima is the founder of country-clothing brand Cotswold Fox.
She is the daughter of Paul and Sarah Gray of Faringdon, Oxfordshire.

Photographed with Moose at Haremoor House, Oxfordshire, by Courtney Hockley

Contents January 28, 2026

Zachary Culpin/BNPS

Are you pulling my leg? The 17th-century statue of Sir Edmund Uvedale—notable for its two left feet—is given an early spring clean by Christine Oliver at Wimborne Minster, Dorset. When the statue's right foot was broken, it was replaced with a copy of the left foot

A thatched cottage in the village of Lockeridge, Wiltshire (Arcaid Images/Alamy)

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In search of the obscure

A LIST of the great yet intangible British attributes that elude official designation might include: self-deprecating humour, fixation with the weather and patience for queueing; cricketing teas, fêtes and flower shows; the outstanding quality of Shakespearean acting and the enduring obsession with Regency romance; an extraordinary willingness to volunteer and an untiring affection for 1970s television (re-runs of *Fawlty Towers*).

Now, there is a move towards such abstract classification by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) for national traditions—eccentricities, even—under the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. This may apply to rituals, story-telling, Scottish dancing, Welsh singing, willow weaving, pagan festivals and 'practices concerning nature and the universe'. Daniel Hyde, choirmaster at King's College, Cambridge, could recently be heard eloquently putting the case for letting the glories of sung Evensong wash over one. The Cathedral Music Trust is championing English sacred choral music, practised not only by trained cathedral choirs, but by amateur singers across the land, and which The Sixteen's director Harry Christophers observes 'sounds as modern as anything written today', to be recognised as a UNESCO Living Heritage.

This country is so rich in talent, tradition and sheer quirkiness that this is the moment to put forward a case and protect a custom from politically correct modernisation or overzealous fussing—it's interesting that one example flagged by the DCMS is the popular annual cheese-rolling contest on Cooper's Hill, Gloucestershire, an event whose safety credentials have been under scrutiny. The Government may find itself challenged when the British Hound Sports Association proposes not revisiting hunting law or political campaigning, but preserving the associated skills of kennel craft—the 'golden thread' that binds hounds and huntsman in mutual devotion, now threatened—plus rural traditions such as point-to-points. It should be added that the subtext behind this Government project is a drive to 'identify the economic value of our traditions'; from field-sports to tar-barrel rolling, such practices contribute significantly to the economy.

Conservation and mob grazing, the planting of wildflower meadows, apple pressing, coracle making, bagpipe playing, the nurturing of rare poultry breeds, Green Man celebrations, fly-fishing, counting flora and fauna, bizarre sports such as bog snorkelling and regional cooking—all have the potential to be recognised as UNESCO Living Heritage. Some commentators observe, reasonably, that the tangible success of such an exercise may be hard to justify, yet diversions such as dry-stone walling, ploughing contests and Morris dancing are a welcome focus at a time of global tension. There's no time to waste; the deadline for submissions is March 27.

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Julie Harding

Report raises questions about RSPB strategy

Grouse moors have become a conservation battleground, with gamekeepers coming under fire from the RSPB

BRITAIN'S moors, especially those in the north of England, have long been a battleground between the RSPB and the shooting fraternity, but a new report, *RSPB Uncovered: The Missing 'Birdcrime' Files*, paints a damning picture of the conservation charity, accusing it of abandoning 'its mission to protect birds' in favour of activities such as 'smear campaigns against anyone who threatens its status as the kingpin of conservation charities'. Additional accusations against the RSPB, whose revenue in 2023/24 was £170 million, include 'smearing the reputation of moorland managers' and 'framing' gamekeepers for wildlife crimes, inaccurately recording bird crimes and misleading the public.

Commissioned by the Campaign 4 the Protection of Moorland Communities (C4PMC), it was researched and compiled by A. B. O'Rourke, a former deputy editor of the *South China Morning Post* and news editor of Fieldsports Channel. He writes in *RSPB Uncovered*: 'It's shocking that charity workers, with no authority or legal powers, have seemingly been allowed to run amok through the countryside, firing accusations at anyone they believe is morally inferior.'

The RSPB was contacted by COUNTRY LIFE with a list of specific questions, which the charity didn't answer, although a spokesperson stated: 'The RSPB strenuously denies all these allegations' and it also sent a statement, which reads in full: 'This report from the shooting lobby appears to take issue with the work of the RSPB's investigation team and some of the prosecutions that have resulted. What it fails to acknowledge is that the RSPB only collects the evidence of criminal activity, which is then handed over to the police. The RSPB has no say in whether cases progress. That decision is down to the local wildlife crime officers and the CPS to determine whether the evidence is sufficiently robust to charge individuals. What we do know from years of evidence is that birds of prey are systematically and illegally killed on land that is often used for gamebird shooting. Recent and forthcoming high-profile cases only strengthen this assertion and the RSPB will continue to shed light on these crimes against the UK's wildlife.'

RSPB Uncovered details how it believes the issues began, including the formation of the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCT) in 2006, at which point, it says, the RSPB was expected to take a step back from investigations, but did not.

Gamekeeper Brian Redhead's story forms one of a number of case studies that are detailed from a period of several years. Mr Redhead says that his house was raided by the RSPB years after he inherited a pre-1981 collection of wild birds' eggs, and, on occasions when visiting North Uist to birdwatch, he was stopped by the police. He claims that he was followed 'around for three years. My life for myself and my family has been a misery and this has got to be harassment on a grand scale'. Mr Redhead tells COUNTRY LIFE: 'This isn't a fairy tale. It's all true. At the time I contacted a solicitor, but they wanted £500 an hour, which I couldn't afford. Unless you're filthy rich, there's no way of challenging [the RSPB]. I think they should be brought to account.'

RSPB Uncovered claims that many people contacted refused to assist with the report as they were 'concerned about retribution'. It concludes with a question: 'Are you a victim of persecution?' followed by a bullet-pointed course of action for those who find the police 'at your home with RSPB "investigators"'.'I made a bullet-point list because the tips may help people who do not know how to react in these situations or realise that RSPB staff have no authority over anyone. Odd cases are constantly popping up,' says Mr O'Rourke. 'The report does not say that everything the RSPB does is bad, but it is clearly relying on its reputation to get away with some pretty shoddy practices.'

Farmers move to tackle abattoir crisis

FARMERS are fighting back against the small abattoir crisis by building their own facilities, delegates at the Oxford Real Farming Conference heard earlier this month. Claire White, a senior veterinary adviser for the NFU, revealed that a group of Cotswold farmers has been campaigning for a north Cotswold abattoir, which is scheduled to open in late 2027. 'It is hoped that this facility will bring back the processing of organic and grass-fed livestock to the region, supporting regenerative farming practices and small food businesses,' she said.

Jane Cooper farms Boreray sheep (*above*) on Orkney, where the abattoir closed in 2018, necessitating a lengthy ferry and road trip to Munro's abattoir in Dingwall. 'I decided that what we needed… was an on-farm, sheep-only abattoir,' said Mrs Cooper, who realised that such a facility could be moveable—as opposed to mobile—for others to use. Enter Andy Gray from Devon-based meat supplier MC Kelly and a member of the Abattoir Sector Group who has designed the Tiny Trailer Abattoir (TTA). It consists of two trailers, a slaughter unit and a chiller unit that can hold up to 20 carcasses. The £100,000 TTA will be owned by the Orkney Boreray Cooperative and hired out to others; it is set to be operational by April on Orkney's mainland and North Ronaldsay. Mr Gray is assisting with the construction and licensing of a new abattoir on St Mary's in the Isles of Scilly, too. 'It is intended primarily for cattle and pigs and will be tailored to the islands' distinctive farming needs,' he says.

As a part of its plans to reform the water industry, the Government is intending to license farmers who keep cattle in an attempt to reduce the amount of cow dung polluting waterways.

Consultation launches on woodburning stoves

A Government consultation on domestic wood- and solid-fuel burning will run until March 19. Intended to reduce air pollution from the stoves and fuels in UK homes, the proposals include tougher emission standards for new stoves, labelling made mandatory for stoves and fuels, with clear emissions information having to be provided, as well as increased enforcement penalties for suppliers who breach standards.

Will Gamble Architects won the Contemporary Extension category of the Listed Property Owners Club (LPOC) Listed and Modern Architectural Awards 2026 for its work at Flint Farm in north Hertfordshire (*left, above*). Dr Jonathan Duck, conservation advisor for the LPOC, said he found the extension to be: 'A visually simple, appropriately scaled, well-detailed, elegant and respectful extension; it is also funky and fun.' Studio Brassica Architects scooped the top accolade in the Conversion, Adaptation and Reuse category for Plas Hendy Stable Block in Monmouthshire (*left, below*), with Dr Duck stating: 'Beautiful, considered and playful—but sensitive.' The Listed Property Show, where the awards will be presented and where the LPOC will launch a new 120-page *Guide to Extending & Renovating Listed Properties*, takes place at Olympia, London W14, on January 30–31. Tickets cost £25 in advance or £30 on the door, but entry is free for LPOC members (www.lpoc.co.uk/the-listed-property-show-london)

Good week for

Pup policy
Ahead of the Scottish elections in May, the Royal Kennel Club has published *The Dog People's Manifesto*, urging politicians to look at canine welfare, from a re-evaluation of dangerous-dog laws to tackling puppy imports to strengthening breed diversity and banning electric shock collars

Gunmakers & co
A petition to reconsider the Government's stance on shotgun licences has garnered more than 100,000 signatories, forcing the issue back into the House of Commons

Farming facts
Sheep grazing on moorland have been found to emit lower levels of methane and carbon dioxide than those foraging on grassland, says an Innovate UK-funded study carried out in the Yorkshire Dales

Legacy chasers

Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire, is giving people the chance to leave their mark on the building by signing one of the roof slates, in exchange for a donation to its £12m restoration

Women in STEM
A statue of pioneering 19th-century mathematician Ada Lovelace, Lord Byron's daughter, now stands at the Hinckley campus of North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College, close to where she grew up

Green energy
The Government has announced its Warm Homes Plan, providing £15bn to households over five years to ensure more of us transition to green-energy sources

Bad week for

New-town detractors
Housing Secretary Steve Reed confirmed during a meeting of the Built Environment Committee that 'work will begin on three new towns within this Parliament'

Honeybees
A dead nest of invasive yellow-legged hornets has been found for the first time in Wales: bad news for their favourite prey: bees **WH**

RHS takes flowers to grand new venues

Flowers for courses: the Gloucestershire home of horse trials will host the RHS Badminton Flower Show on July 8–12

THE RHS will run two new touring shows in July, at Badminton, site of the famous horse trials in Gloucestershire, and at Norfolk's royal estate at Sandringham. 'These shows are set in some of the most iconic and historically rich landscapes that we have in this country, offering remarkable settings to really celebrate the best of British horticulture,' says RHS director Clare Matterson.

The King will collaborate with Chelsea Gold medal-winning designer Catherine MacDonald on the RHS Royal Legacy Garden at the RHS Sandringham Flower Show (July 22–26), which will include many of his favourite plants and will use local materials.

'We've already had some discussions about the design,' says Ms MacDonald. 'In terms of the planting, that's going to be quite bold and colourful, and we're probably going to try to champion rural and horticultural skills.'

Badminton has a long history of pioneering with plants, the 1st Duchess of Beaufort, Mary Somerset (1630–1715), having assembled a mass of flora from around the world at her Gloucestershire estate. To celebrate this illustrious past, the RHS Badminton Flower Show (July 8–12) will feature a special exhibition for the host venue. Also on the 34-acre site, the 75th anniversary of the BBC's *The Archers* will be marked with a themed garden designed by multi-medalled designer Jo Thompson, who says: 'Bridge Farm is a place that lives very vividly in people's imaginations and the garden at RHS Badminton is about bringing that much-loved place to life—full of warmth, productivity and optimism.'

No shows will run in 2026 at Tatton Park, in Cheshire or Hampton Court in London, venues for the RHS touring shows last year. Visit www.rhs.org.uk to buy tickets.

All plants sold at the five RHS gardens—Bridgewater in Greater Manchester, Harlow Carr (North Yorkshire), Hyde Hall (Essex), Rosemoor (Devon) and Wisley (Surrey)—and through its online shop will now be in 'no new peat'. Meanwhile, the RHS's vice president James Alexander-Sinclair will be taking his *James and Joe Garden Show* podcast (presented with gold medal garden designer Joe Swift) to Rosara at Nicholsons, Oxfordshire, on March 10. The theme will be 'love in the garden' and the podcast can be found on Spotify, Apple Podcasts and YouTube.

Snowdrop shows signal spring's arrival

SNOWDROPS, wrote William Wordsworth, are a 'venturous harbinger of Spring', and who isn't eager to see the white, bell-shaped heads rise above frosty or damp soil to herald the beginning of the end of the winter months. Events to look forward to that celebrate the diminutive, but joyful *Galanthus nivalis* include the annual Shepton Snowdrop Festival (created to mark the legacy of James Allen, a 19th-century amateur breeder) which returns for its 10th year (February 20–21). For the first time, it will be accompanied by the Great Snowdrop Gardens Trail of Somerset. 'We're proud that all the special snowdrop gardens in Somerset have joined us, from Forde Abbey, Dunster Castle and Snowdrop Valley on Exmoor to Hestercombe, East Lambrook Gardens and the Bishop's Palace in Wells,' says festival director Amanda Hirst.

Further east, Kent's Great Comp Garden will host its yearly Snowdrop & Plant Fair on February 15, with specialist nurseries displaying and selling rare and unusual snowdrops, as well as a selection of early spring-flowering bulbs. At Easton Walled Gardens, Lincolnshire, snowdrops mark the reawakening of a place that, from 1951, was left to go wild, until Ursula Cholmeley began a major renovation in 2000. 'Our Snowdrop Walks... have an origin here that is mysterious. Some people say they arrived with the Romans when they marched down the Great North Road (A1), whereas others believe the Tudor branch of the Cholmeley family brought them here,' says Lady Cholmeley. Easton opens from February 11.

The white harbingers of spring have begun to appear all over

Further north, Cambo Country House and Estate, which is situated on Fife's coastline and is home to the UK's Plant Heritage national collection of snowdrops, will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of its Snowdrop Festival. Established by Catherine Erskine, this festival runs until March 11. It forms a link to the long history of snowdrops at Cambo, as Lady Magdalen Erskine encouraged their growth from the 1930s.

Galanthophiles are also in for a treat at 120 snowdrop gardens that form part of the National Garden Scheme (www.ngs.org.uk), some private and some public, and those in the latter category running snowdrop days include Welford Park, Berkshire (February 4), Gatton Park, Surrey (February 8), Blakenham Woodland Garden, Suffolk (February 8) and Benington Lordship in Hertfordshire (February 10).

Alamy; Getty; Johan Dehlin; Francesco Montaguti; Shutterstock; Dave Rorke; The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA); Creative Commons

Shepherds make merry as they tend to their flocks in Claude Lorrain's *Landscape with Rural Dance*, a pastoral idyll painted in about 1640 in Rome. Claude, the son of a peasant, was renowned for depicting natural light on water, and by the time he created this work (at 46½in by 58½in, one of his largest pieces from the period) he was recognised as Italy's leading landscape painter. *Landscape with Rural Dance* has been in the UK for more than 250 years and, since coming to the market, at £9 million, it has become the subject of a temporary export bar. Christopher Baker, of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, says: 'Claude created a deeply seductive, escapist vision of the warmth of southern Europe through his bucolic and poetic landscape paintings. This serene example… shows him at the height of his powers… Because of its transcendent beauty and fascinating history, which warrants further research, as well as the profound influence of such paintings on British taste, every effort should be made to secure it for a public collection'

Suffragette medal on display

A RARE silver Suffragette medal that belonged to Catherine Pine, the chief nurse to Suffragette movement leader Emmeline Pankhurst, is to go on show to the public for the first time, at 'In Focus: Nurse Catherine Pine', a new display at the Florence Nightingale Museum, London SE1 (March 8–October 4). Nurse Pine, who also ran the Suffragettes' refuge and cared for Pankhurst's 'war babies', not only treated Pankhurst when she was on hunger strike, but she helped sisters Christabel and Sylvia Pankhurst escape arrest. The medal was awarded 'For Duty' by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).

Nurse Pine died in 1941 and bequeathed her medal to the British College of Nurses. It went missing, however, but was recently traced to an auction being held in the US, where it was purchased by Dr Hope Elizabeth May. She has now loaned it to the museum. For more information, visit www.florence-nightingale.co.uk

Nurse Pine, awarded the medal 'For Duty', tends to Emmeline Pankhurst

Country Mouse

From the Andes with love

AS dark, wet and dreary as these last few days of January might seem, daily lunchtime walks with my labradors, Nimrod and Rocky, always bring solace and cheer. Whether it's the drifts of dainty white snowdrops that have somehow thrust up through the sodden soil or the primroses and daffodils sprinkling the verges here in Somerset, I'm heartened to see these uplifting attestations of spring.

The highlight of a somewhat gloomy month, however, is that my boys and I have made a new friend in a gentle and well-mannered huacaya alpaca called Percy. We tend to head past the field he shares with a flock of home-bred geese most days and have gradually formed a touching alliance.

Originally from the Altiplano in west-central South America, these extraordinary-looking creatures are one of the region's four camelids (the others being vicuña, guanaco and llama). Much prized in the Andes for their luxuriously soft and strong fleeces, they were imported to the UK in the late 1990s by free-range poultry breeders, who recognised their propensity to protect flocks from foxes. With padded feet instead of hooves and no top front teeth, alpacas are gentle grazers, so they cause minimal damage to pasture. Our pal Percy certainly appears to be happy with his lot in this corner of the West Country. **PM**

Town Mouse

Cold, rain and chocolate

IT'S easy to forget between times exactly how depressing a really grey, cold and wet stretch of January can be. Last week, the days seemed to be in competition as to which might be the bleakest. As a matter of fact, the easy winner—but also paradoxically the most beautiful—was a day in Yorkshire. Although the sun never seemed to clear the horizon and the sky wept unceasingly, the mere fact of being out in the weather greatly improved it. Getting wet, particularly when properly dressed and with the promise of a fire to return to, is so much more tolerable than merely sitting indoors and watching the rain fall. A marginally less gloomy day in London, by contrast, involved a broken umbrella, three soakings and some dissolved papers.

Still, the capital has other qualities to recommend it in January. As darkness falls and the lights come on, the weather recedes in importance and the streets heave with cheerful activity. There are also the last vestiges of Christmas to enjoy at home. Among them this year is a beautiful box filled with expensive chocolates. On the pretext of releasing the box for other purposes, there is an attempt to empty it of its contents. The task is strangely rewarding, particularly when watching the rain fall. **JG**

Town & Country Notebook

Edited by Agnes Stamp

Quiz of the week

1) Emma, Lady Hamilton was the muse of which famous British artist?
2) A 'flamboyance' is the collective noun for which animal?
3) Name the volcano that looms above the Gulf of Naples
4) Which traditional British dish is made of meat wrapped in pâté and pastry?
5) Two planets have no moons—name them

Riddle me this

What can you catch in January with your eyes closed, but never throw?

100 years ago in COUNTRY LIFE January 9, 1926

WITH nearly half a million acres of land devoted to its culture in England and Wales, the potato is one of the most important of the intensive crops grown. There is, however, a very large acreage devoted to potatoes which does not yield a satisfactory return. The reasons are numerous, but it is evident from a survey of possible causes of crop failures that potato culture demands more care every year. In normal circumstances it is a crop which well repays specialisation. Perhaps the most vital point in the growing of potatoes is the choice of a suitable variety obtained from a suitable locality. Disease is the bane of the potato grower and some diseases are brought with the potato. This particularly applies to the now much-discussed virus diseases like leaf-curl and mosaic.

1) George Romney 2) Flamingos 3) Mount Vesuvius 4) Beef Wellington 5) Mercury and Venus. Riddle me this: The common cold

The love of a tyke

Lakeland terrier

RESEMBLING a miniature Airedale, the Lakeland was developed with strains of Bedlington, Border, Dandie Dinmont and wire-haired fox terrier to control vermin in the fells. As COUNTRY LIFE noted in 1935, the breed was chiefly required to 'creep through narrow spaces among the rocks, where any digging would be impossible,' resulting in breeding points that encouraged a narrow chest and 'ribs not too much sprung'.

The breed was championed by Tommy Dobson, master of the Eskdale and Ennerdale Foxhounds for 53 years. An obituary at the time of his death in 1910 stated that he especially adored 'the game little terriers which he bred so successfully and for which he was specially noted. These terriers are most necessary for bolting a fox once it gets to ground in the screes and boulders which cover the fell sides'. The breed was officially accepted by the Kennel Club in 1928. A Lakeland terrier called Stingray of Derryabah is one of the few dogs to have won Best in Show at both Crufts and the transatlantic equivalent, the Westminster Kennel Club Show in the US, in 1967. *AS*

From 'Country Life's Book of Dogs' (Rizzoli, £50)

Time to buy

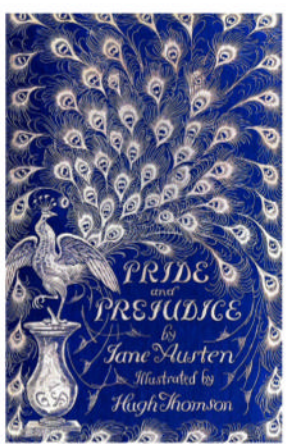
Prism Cocktail Shaker in Green: a hand-crafted, stand-alone glass show-piece, £180, L'Objet (https://uk.l-objet.com)

***A Room With A View* soap:** a book-inspired bar with notes of bergamot and petitgrain, £10, Soap Poetry (https://soappoetry.co.uk)

On this day...

January 28, 1813

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was published in London by T. Egerton to positive reviews. Colin Firth, who played a memorable Mr Darcy in the classic BBC 1995 adaptation, reportedly nearly passed on the role: 'I thought this is just a guy who stands around for hours driving people to despair.'



A novel note

'What is it about mothers and the phone which, immediately you say you have to go, makes them think of nineteen completely irrelevant things they have to tell you that minute?'
***Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason,* Helen Fielding**

Poet's corner

'Eight years and five
round-rolling moons
He thus saw steal away,
Dozing out all his idle noons,
And every night at play'
***Epitaph on a Hare,* William Cowper**

Sarah Farnsworth/Country Life Picture Library/Future Plc; Alamy; Chuhail/Dreamstime.com; James Dodds, *Metamorphosis (Finished Tsemikoperama)*, 120cm x 95cm, oil on linen. Image courtesy of David Messum Fine Art; Annabelle King/Future Plc

The taste of Britain
Perthshire: Haggis

THE 'chieftain of the puddin' race' isn't only eaten in Perthshire, of course, but with Burns Night fresh in the memory this feels like the ideal opportunity to celebrate it. The dish of sheep's heart, lungs and liver, minced with suet and oatmeal and generously seasoned, is ubiquitous this week—but where did it come from? The Norman French word *haguier*, related to *hacher*, crops up in an early-14th-century medical text and the earliest recorded recipe for haggis is found in the *Liber Cure Cocorum*, a Middle English cookbook of about 1420 (appropriately, the instructions are given in verse form). Haggis at this point was by no means considered solely Scottish, but was popular all over England; it was Burns who cemented the link. It seems to be one of those dishes whose symbolic import grows larger the further it travels from its origins: in her article *Haggis in the Raj*, a study of Scottish identity in late Imperial India, Prof Elizabeth Buettner records haggis being enjoyed not only on Burns Night, but St Andrews Day, too, describing a 1906 celebration in Bombay in which it was piped in and 'everybody shouted and hooched and made a great noise'. Today, internet wags use AI to generate spoof images of 'wild haggis', digital cryptids like fat guinea pigs with one leg shorter than the others to help them scale Highland peaks. *EH*

Illustration by Kateryna Kyslitska

Wine o'clock

Caramel and coffee

Lustau, East India Solera, Jerez, Spain. £14.25–£22.99/50cl, Butlers Wine Cellar, NY Wines, The Whisky Exchange, Waitrose, Waud Handford, alc 20%

This blend of 80% Oloroso with 20% Pedro Ximénez is, strictly speaking, a cream sherry, but is a world away from the sickly stereotype. A gorgeous mélange of raisins, figs, nuts, caramel and coffee.

Visit www.decanter.com

Time for tea

Keemun black tea

This tea has a winey aroma and reddish-amber liquor. First crafted in 1875 in Qimen County, China, the tea bushes are nurtured by the misty Yellow Mountains, with their rich red soil and gentle rainfall, and Keemun is celebrated for its refined balance of depth and delicacy. Originally prized by Queen Victoria, Keemun became the backbone of many English breakfast blends. It was China's first black tea created specifically for export, transforming the nation's tea trade within a decade. Its distinctive character combines soft floral notes with hints of cocoa and honey, developing a smooth, lingering finish. Keemun's charm lies in its subtlety, a tea to savour slowly. Keemun is the anglicised name of the county Qimen, with 'Qi' meaning the place and 'Men' meaning gate or door. Enter.

How to serve

Steep for 3½ minutes in freshly boiled water. Enjoy plain or with a dash of milk.

Where to buy

Twinings sells 125g for £15 (01264 313444; www.twinings.co.uk), or try a specialist retailer such as Fortnum & Mason (020–7734 8040; www.fortnumandmason.com)

Jonathon Jones tastes tea and exports English-grown tea worldwide

Unmissable events

February 3 and 6 Candlemas evenings, Weald & Downland Living Museum, Singleton, West Sussex. Enjoy an atmospheric evening—with fireside discussions and traditional mulled wine—inside the museum's North Cray Medieval House (01243 811363; www.wealddown.co.uk)

February 4–27 'James Dodds: Love Is A Boat' (*pictured*), David Messum Fine Art, Bury Street, London SW1. Beautiful clinkers, luggers, Essex smacks, Norfolk crabbers, lifeboats and rowing boats, all painted in jewel-like colours and suspended in space (020–7287 4448; www.messums.com)

February 7–22 'Litany for the Border', Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland. In a collaboration between artists Gareth Hudson and Toby Thirling and composer Eleanor Cully Boehringer, choreographed beams of light will dance across the sky as a new piece of music resounds across the River Tweed (01289 330999; www.maltingsberwick.co.uk)

February 28–March 1 Chair-caning workshop, Master The Art, Shrewsbury, Shropshire. Under the guidance of Rachael South, learn all six weaving stages of the standard six-way chair caning pattern before caning your own chair (07769 707717; www.mastertheart.uk)

Book now

March 14–April 25 *Henry V*, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. Alfred Enoch plays the Bard's warrior-king in this patriotic story of war and romance (01789 331111; www.rsc.org.uk)

Will Hosie

How much do you know about Greenland?

True ruler of the snow-bound land: an Inuit hunter and his team traverse frozen Baffin Bay

WELL now. That was, as they say, a lot. Storm Goretti, Venezuela, Valentino, Fiona from *The Traitors*—not for years have our heads rolled so much within a single calendar month. One item still appears to have trumped the others, however. Greenland, America's sweetheart in the quest for world domination, has become our *cause célèbre*. Yet how much do we know about the island, really? Ask any friend or lover and they'd probably admit to ignoring why the Danes own the place to begin with.

Fortunately, I have done some digging. Sit tight, dear reader, and take notes. The Danes first docked in Greenland in 1721, when its kingdom and that of Norway—then a joint force—decided to spread the word of God. They thought these northerly lands were home to the descendants of their Norse ancestors, who had set sail from Iceland nearly 800 years earlier. By the 18th century, all of them had died out.

The Danes, finding hardy Inuits, founded a colony instead. This lasted until 1953, when Denmark made Greenland an overseas county. The kingdom's grip had begun to loosen during the Second World War after the Nazis conquered Denmark and established a foothold on Greenland. There, they operated several weather stations, which proved key in the North Atlantic weather war.

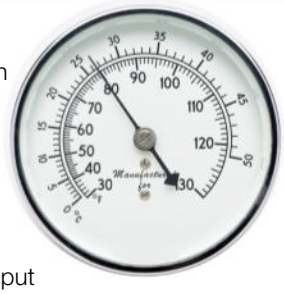
The US destroyed the last of these and, by 1944, the final few Germans had left. Although Denmark promptly reasserted its rule, its hold over Greenland had weakened. Home rule was established in 1979; since then, the island has embraced its Greenlandic heritage. The standard language is that of the Kalaallit, an Inuit tribe on the island's western flank, near the capital of Nuuk. The economy runs chiefly on fish and crustacean exports, having previously relied on mining.

The territory is still part of the Danish realm: as such, Greenland receives the equivalent of $500 million–$600 million in Danish subsidies each year, which helps to pay for the boats the Greenlanders use to fish, heat their homes and fly any islander requiring specialist medical treatment to Denmark. It also covers the delivery of supplies made from ingredients that could never be grown on site.

The land is shared with Arctic seals and polar bears, which Inuit men hunt in order to prove their valour. Greenlandic fjords freeze for seven months a year; in June, the sun shines for more than 21 hours a day. An estimated 30 billion barrels worth of oil line the coast, but previous attempts at extraction have been fruitless. Since 2021, the government has had a moratorium on offshore drilling.

There. Sorry. That was a lot, too. You can thank me next time your pub quiz features a round on Greenland—it's bound to happen at some point soon—or when you book a holiday to the island once things have properly settled. After all, this is the best PR Greenland has had in years. What's that? Ah, sorry, there are no direct flights from here—but return flights from Reykjavik in Iceland to Nuuk are only £417 right now…

Hotline spring



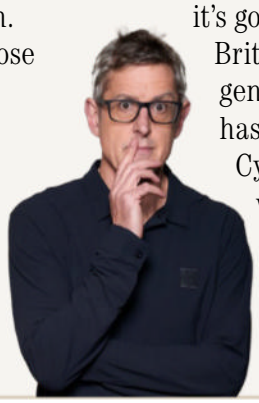
Bath, where Jane Austen wrote *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*, is named for its hot springs, first discovered by the Romans in AD43. The 2025 anniversary of Austen's birth may have put Bath back on the map, but it is the city's Roman heritage, more than its Regency era, with which today's travellers are connecting.

Indeed, hot springs seem to be having a moment. As wellness comes to dominate the travel industry, from yoga retreats to surfing holidays, it feels only natural that thermal baths—good for the skin, respiration and blood circulation—should follow suit. Some have already christened the trend 'therma-tourism': winners are Budapest in Hungary, Iceland and Terme di Saturnia in Tuscany, Italy. In the US, therma-tourism is expected to grow by 14.8% year-on-year until 2030. Cold plunges are officially out; time for 36°C waters.

What you might have missed

When filmmaker Louis Theroux (*below*) appeared last month on 'Subway Takes', a video series by comedian Kareem Rahma in which he asks people on public transport for a controversial opinion, he used the opportunity to rail against the gym. 'I think they should close down all gyms where people work out,' Mr Theroux said. 'I find it utterly pointless that people spend energy doing nothing.'

He has a point: people used to build muscle mass via useful pursuits such as haymaking; today, one could just as easily do so by carrying an elderly person's groceries. Mr Theroux calls this 'ambient exercise'. The following is not quite that, but I hope it's good news nonetheless. Britain's first energy-generating spin studio has just opened at Revolt Cycling, London WC1, with all the power in the building depending on the performance of the cyclists. Hit that pedal, Jack.



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Letters to the Editor

Mark Hedges

Letter of the week

Who shot the dodo?

YOUR feature on dodos (*'Going, going, gone?', January 14*) mentions the Oxford dodo, which came to the Ashmolean via the Tradescants', father and son, own museum of curiosities in the 1680s. For many years, it was believed that the bird had arrived in England on a ship and 'performed' in London—there are records of audiences paying to see a living one—before dying from either the cold weather or old age. However, a scan of its skull in 2018 revealed that it had, in fact, been shot several times in the back of the head. By whom, nobody seems to know; to the best of my knowledge this case of murder most fowl remains unsolved.

Tim Olsen, Oxfordshire

The writer of the letter of the week will win a bottle of Pol Roger Brut Réserve Champagne

Young at heart

OUR seven-year-old son Archie (*pictured*) keeps hens, grows vegetables and sells the surplus to his neighbours in our village. It is an enterprise that would have been familiar to earlier generations. He delights particularly in conversation with local farmers and landowners, listening to their counsel and learning the ways of the land. Such small exchanges remind one how quietly the countryside passes on its wisdom.

Adrian and Jodie Morris, Essex

Family names

I WAS lintrigued to read your excellent article on Leigh Lawson, collector of memorabilia relating to the music hall star Marie Lloyd (*Arts & antiques, January 7*). My great-uncle, Harold Aylin, married Lloyd's daughter in 1907. He was, like most of my father's family, a horseman: both my grandfather and his brother, my namesake, Clyde Aylin, rode in the Grand National several times. Clyde, an Englishman, became champion jockey of Ireland and died tragically young aged 35 after a steeplechase fall at Leopardstown in 1922 when riding for Lord Derby. *The Irish Times* obituary declared him 'the greatest horseman of the 20th century'. *Maj (Rtd) C. G. P. Aylin*

A novel idea

IT was good to see Norton Conyers featured in COUNTRY LIFE (*Country-house treasures, January 14*). Living just down the road in Ripon, I was once privileged to share with other local writers a tour given by Sir James Graham himself. That was not long after the discovery of the old attic staircase hidden by panelling for more than a century and a chill ran up my spine as I peered up it. During Charlotte Brontë's (*left*) own visit to Norton Conyers in 1839, the Grahams of the day must indeed have spoken of 'Mad Mary', confined in the attic many years beforehand. What a gift to any writer! I needed no convincing that their family legend inspired the tragedy at the heart of *Jane Eyre* and only wished that I had heard it first.

Maggie Cobbett, North Yorkshire

Stamp of approval

I WHOLEHEARTEDLY agree with Kevin Duffy's suggestion that we should all make more of an effort with the handwritten word (*Letters, January 21*). When I was a little girl, my father used to send me the most fantastic postcards from his various architectural jaunts. I couldn't decipher his exuberant handwriting ever time, but they always felt special and opened my eyes to some far-flung treasure, culture or place.

Agnes Stamp, Isle of Wight

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Alamy; Getty

Show your hand

THE otherwise excellent article on playing cards by Matthew Dennison (*'Playing your cards right', January 7*) omitted to mention their use as mounts for miniatures. The subject of Nicholas Hilliard's *An Unknown Man* (about 1600) in the V&A Museum, London SW7, is shown against flames to represent his passionate love for an unknown person, whose miniature portrait probably resides in the locket he holds. The miniature is painted on vellum and mounted on a playing card with the Ace of Hearts, invisible to all, but perhaps the Unknown Man knew it was there.

Dr Susan Bracken, by email

Iron lady

FOLLOWING your reader's letter on iron churches (*January 14*), I can go one better. My three-times great-aunt, the formidable Countess Georgina de Stacpoole, not only founded the Roman Catholic West Battersea Mission's tin tabernacle in 1875, but lived next door in a corrugated iron caravan for five years. This was unlikely to have contained an iron bath, however, as she also maintained a suite at the Cadogan Hotel, London, in addition to her homes in Paris and Rome.

Peter Gower Griffiths, London

COUNTRY LIFE FEBRUARY 4

Let's fly away: marvel at Madagascar's lemurs, gain perspective amid the vastness of British Columbia, take the train back in time and choose your dream hotel. Plus, chemical warfare in the natural world and the rise and rise of the rugby shirt

An inspector calls

AGROMENES has a new hero. He remains anonymous, but he calls himself the Food Waste Inspector. He has been busy outing some big supermarkets—M&S, Waitrose and Lidl—for throwing away food that is perfectly good to eat. His bin pictures show sliced meat, whole chickens, potatoes and wine—all good to sell, but chucked in the refuse bins. After his story hit social media, one store's response was to lock their bins so our hero could no longer look inside. Now, these major outlets have serious investigations under way and the big names concerned have set about recovering their reputation for fighting food waste and doing what they can to distribute surplus products to the needy.

That is a worthy determination. The UK wastes more food than any other country in Europe, enough to feed 30 million people in a nation where more than eight million go short and in a world where 733 million face hunger. Much of that wastage comes from our own homes where, on average, a family throws away £470 worth of food a year, 70% of which is edible. In addition to what is wasted at home, retail outlets discard 270,000 tons of food annually. This is where the inspector comes in. His revelations highlight the very worst kind of wastage: food that is well before its sell-by date and yet is chucked in the bin.

> 'The UK wastes more food than any other country in Europe, enough to feed 30 million people'

However, this is only the tip of Britain's enormous pile of waste. Only 7% of total food surplus from manufacture or retailing is redistributed to the needy; 93% of the surplus food that we grow, pack and distribute is destroyed, and that represents 25 million tons of greenhouse-gas emissions—more than the emissions caused by all the big HGV lorries on the road put together.

This can't go on. It's not only that it is scandalous to waste so much when there are so many people with so little, it is simply that we are going to be increasingly pressed to grow the food that we need. The loss of agricultural land to building, the continued reduction in the fertility of the soil, the damaging effects of climate change and a growing population—all make it more challenging to meet our domestic targets in a world where the same pressures globally make food imports increasingly difficult and expensive. Yet the reduction of wastage is simply not central to national policies. The parallel with energy is useful. We are rightly shifting from fossil fuels to renewables, but the best immediate change would be to waste less electricity, gas and oil. Yet energy saving is way down the agenda of all political parties.

As a society, we seem inured to waste, which means we don't take the measures that could make the necessary difference. It's not only that the supermarkets should make sure that the Food Waste Inspector will never again find good food thrown away in their bins. It is that all of them should take more responsibility for their waste and, indeed, their customers' waste. We've got rid of BOGOFs—Buy One Get One Free—but we haven't stopped the deals that make buying three packets so much cheaper than single purchases. They encourage us to buy more than we need and make waste much more likely. It also isn't made easy enough to buy small quantities of fresh food, such as two carrots or a single little gem lettuce. Selling more by encouraging waste is simply not acceptable. Of course, in the end, it's about individual choices, but retailers have a responsibility to make it easier and cheaper to do the right thing.

Athena
Cultural Crusader

Does culture have pride of place?

AS Athena went to press, the Government announced a package of £1.5 billion capital spending 'to restore national pride'. According to the press release, the intention is to invest this sum in cultural organisations over five years, 'turning the corner on underfunding over the last decade'. The bold promise is 'to save more than 1,000 cherished Arts venues, museums, libraries and heritage buildings across England from closure… fix urgent capital needs and open up access to culture for everyone, everywhere'. It goes on, 'funding for our treasured cultural venues will ensure vital, affordable and welcoming spaces are available for communities to come together and celebrate what makes their local area special'. The Culture Secretary is quoted as saying: 'At a time when forces seek to divide us, arts, culture and heritage are what bind us together. Our local cultural institutions aren't just buildings—they're part of who we are... they help tell our national story, and provide unique opportunities for young people to pursue their dreams.'

> 'How much of it is new money as opposed to shuffled budgets?'

We have heard similar effusions before, but not with the scale of financial backing promised here. This comprises £760 million for museums, the lion's share of which—£600 million—will be for the infrastructure of national museums and Government-sponsored cultural organisations. The £160 million left 'will be invested in our local and regional museums', with the aim of dealing with maintenance backlogs and a transition towards 'more sustainable business models'. There will also be £425 million for about '300 capital projects in Arts venues across the country'; £230 million for 'protecting and preserving heritage buildings, including listed places of worship'; £75 million for repairs to historic buildings at risk; £46 million for local communities 'to take control of… local heritage and bring buildings back into public use'; £27.5 million for libraries and £80 million capital funding over four years 'to benefit National Portfolio organisations that receive regular investment from Arts Council England' (ACE). A £92 million fund called the Places of Worship Renewal Fund will replace the £23 million Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, promising these buildings 'access to the same level of financial support from the government as historic houses, monuments and other heritage sites'.

Before rushing out to celebrate this news, however, Athena wants more detail. How much of this fund is really new money for culture as opposed to shuffled budgets? Who will administer it and—thinking of the ACE debacle—on what terms? Bluntly, also, is it enough? £300 million of this fund could go straight back to the Treasury as VAT and major museum projects are costly. The National Gallery has raised £375 million towards its forthcoming Domani Project (*without* Government help) and the proposed renovation of the British Museum will probably cost more than £1 billion. Athena, therefore, welcomes this promised £1.5 billion spread over five years, but reserves judgement on how generous it really is.

The way we were Photographs from the Country Life archive

1920s **Unpublished**

Late morning on London's Oxford Street is busy—by the standards of the day—with buses and shoppers. Commanding the view is the section of the Selfridges façade that was built in 1906–09. The vast present frontage was completed in 1928. Every other clearly visible building in this view has been replaced.

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My favourite painting Beverly Joubert

Contending Group After Nature by Sir Edwin Landseer

***Contending Group After Nature*, 1822, pen and black and brown ink with grey and brown wash over graphite on laid paper, 6¾in by 9in, by Sir Edwin Landseer (1802–73), National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, US**

Beverly Joubert is co-owner of Great Plains Conservation and a *National Geographic* explorer-at-large. Her latest book, *Wild Eye: A Life in Photographs*, is out now

'Probably the most impressive influences in 19th-century art on our work at Great Plains are from Sir Edwin Landseer and a piece comes to mind–*Contending Group After Nature*, which shows a brawl between a lion, a tiger and a leopard–because of his accurate, but dramatic depictions of big cats. The works that reside at the foot of Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square almost overshadow the person who sculpted the bronze lions: Landseer. Every wildlife photographer's passion was probably born from these original influences of this one man'

Charlotte Mullins comments on *Contending Group After Nature*

SIR EDWIN LANDSEER came from a family of artists and was a child prodigy, winning the Society of Arts' Silver Palette in 1813 for his animal studies, at the age of 11. Two years later, he exhibited drawings of a mule and several dogs at the Royal Academy of Art's (RA) annual exhibition, the year before he entered the RA's teaching schools. His first and favourite subject was the animal kingdom and he sketched regularly at the Royal Menagerie on the Strand in London. In conditions that would horrify us today, lions, tigers and even an elephant were kept in small cages on the upper floors of the Exeter Exchange building, above a shopping arcade. Owned by the animal dealer Edward Cross, the menagerie existed until 1829, when the building was demolished and its occupants were sent to the new Surrey Zoological Gardens in Southwark and London Zoo.

Contending Group After Nature brings together a lion, tiger and leopard, which fight for the prey that lies underneath their writhing, snarling bodies. Through Landseer's careful observation of such caged creatures and his ability to transform them into characters fighting to stay alive in the wild, he created hugely dynamic scenes that captured the hearts of the art world, royalty and the public. Many of his most famous paintings of lions, deer, horses and dogs were disseminated as engravings and Queen Victoria commissioned him to paint her pets. Animal studies such as this one were the reason he was asked to make Trafalgar Square's giant bronze lions in the 1860s.

Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington

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Doddington Hall, Lincolnshire

A fatal shot

JAMES BIRCH holds the buff coat once worn by John Hussey, the second son of Sir Edward Hussey of Doddington Hall, who was killed in fierce fighting on Foxby Hill at the Battle of Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, on July 28, 1643. A hole in the right breast of the leather coat shows that the 21-year-old Royalist cavalry officer was shot. The fatal musket ball also pierced the collar rim of the breastplate he wore, visible on the chair to the right and in the detail below. There is no exit hole, so the ball must have lodged in his body. Hussey's helmet, gloves and boots also remain at the hall, in a very rare and complete survival from the time. They are not well matched, however. The breast plate is suited for a pikeman and the buff coat was, by the standards of the 1640s, both old and thin. The helmet is likewise antiquated, all hinting at the improvised armament of even wealthy soldiers in the Civil War.

'Many Royalist houses were burnt down,' observes Mr Birch, 'but Doddington may have been spared because one of John Hussey's aunts was married to Ferdinando Fairfax, father of Black Tom Fairfax, commander of the Parliamentarian New Model Army (vividly illustrating the complexity of civil war).' A portrait of the ill-fated Hussey hangs in the house. *JG*

Visit www.doddingtonhall.com

Photographs by Jesse Wild

‘There is no exit hole, so the bullet must have lodged in his body’

Fig 1 facing page: **The entrance portico, with its remarkable series of portraits in cameo, within a neo-Pompeiian decorative scheme.**
Fig 2: **A view of Schloss Charlottenhof across the fountain pool. A formal garden runs along the berm of earth to the left**

A world of dreams

Schloss Charlottenhof, Brandenburg

A property in the care of the Prussian Palaces and Gardens Foundation Berlin-Brandenburg

The desire for a retreat from the cares of the Prussian court and the formality of palace protocol created a neo-Classical masterpiece, as **Aoife Caitríona Lau** explains

Photographs by Paul Highnam

FIRST established in 1745 by Frederick the Great, the Park of Sanssouci or 'without-care' at Potsdam was developed as the summer retreat of the Hohenzollern Kings of Prussia—and later German Emperors—from their nearby capital of Berlin (*'A world without care', October 15, 2025*). Among the numerous palaces, follies and garden buildings that came to ornament this expansive landscape is a small, but important neo-Classical villa called Schloss Charlottenhof. Built between 1826 and 1829 by the Greek Revival architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel, it was described by the celebrated landscape architect who collaborated on the design of its gardens, Peter Joseph Lenné, as 'a fantastic creation, with the magic of a strange, dreamed, longed-for world'.

In 1819, the Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, later Friedrich Wilhelm IV, met and fell in love with Elisabeth of Bavaria. The two shared an interest in the Arts, but their different religious confessions—he was Lutheran and she Catholic—delayed their marriage until 1823. During this period, he began to sketch designs for a magnificent family home in Potsdam in the form of a vast multi-storied Roman palace named 'Belriguardo', complete with viaduct, temple and a triumphal arch.

In the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, however, the Prussian treasury was depleted and the Crown Prince was persuaded towards a project of more modest proportions. As a gift, in 1825, Friedrich Wilhelm III presented his son with a farmland and house named 'Charlottenhof', which adjoined the south section of the royal park.

The Crown Prince immediately set to work with Schinkel to design his own perfect summer villa on the site of the farmstead. Schinkel was by 1825 well established as an architect. His buildings were prominent across Berlin and he was already involved in the park of Sanssouci itself, where he was at work on another residence at Schloss Glienicke for Prince Carl of Prussia.

In his work to the Charlottenhof, Schinkel was particularly inspired by the Choragic Monument of Thrasyllus on the south face of the Acropolis in Athens, Greece. He was, however, also forced into a close collaboration with his patron, who was fascinated with architectural design. For the Crown Prince, building his very own palace was not simply a playful expression of intellect, but a symbolic gesture of idyllic world-building. He yearned for a perfect haven to offer both himself and his young bride a bucolic retreat from the rigours of court and began to refer to the Charlottenhof as his 'Siam' or Arcadia.

The Crown Prince's vision for 'Siam' was, in fact, Italy, specifically the palatial villas →

Fig 3: **The front hall. The doors and the statue niches are furnished with brilliant-crimson baize secured with gold-headed pins**

of Laurentinum, located by Ostia, and Tusca in Tuscany, described by Pliny the Younger, the patrician magistrate of ancient Rome. Crucially, his knowledge of Italy and Italian architecture was as yet entirely theoretical and book-learnt, owing to the fact that his father refused him permission to travel to Rome until 1828.

It is important to note that Charlottenhof was never intended by Wilhelm to function as a residence. With their formal apartments located in Sanssouci, just over a mile away in the royal park, the couple only ever enjoyed Charlottenhof for day trips to host picnics, teas or small dinner parties. It did have bedrooms, including one for the royal pair located between their respective studies, but these were wholly decorative **(*Fig 8*)**.

As well as working on the villa, the Prince, Schinkel and Lenné—who was well acquainted with English theory, as evidenced in his *General Remarks on British Parks and Gardens* (1824)—designed an extensive complex of interconnecting gardens and subsidiary buildings. These included a Roman baths, a teahouse and the gardener's house, a well-proportioned Italianate villa for the head gardener and his apprentices.

To a remarkable degree, the Charlottenhof cannibalises the fabric of the late-18th-century farmhouse it replaces. There are no images of this building, but it is presumed to have been built in the traditional Prussian style of the time; a low building, double-fronted and likely 8–10 windows across, with steps leading to an elevated front door. Schinkel altered the roof and added a semi-circular bay window to the bedroom of the Crown Prince and Princess. He also swallowed the original entrance stair within a new front hall and raised up a garden terrace to the rear of the building **(*Fig 2*)**.

Fig 4: **Stained glass casts a blue shadow over the entrance hall. In the centre is an exquisitely modelled bronze fountain. The low doorway leads to the service areas**

Fig 5: **The front door is detailed after the Monument of Thrasyllus. The mullions and transom form a cross, a reference to the building's underlying Early Christian plan**

It has been convincingly argued by Dr Samuel Wittwer that the design of the villa reflects two of the Crown Prince's great interests, Antiquity and the Early Christian Church. The overall plan of the building and its terrace, for example, echoes that of a basilica, complete with atrium, narthex, aisles, nave and apse, whereas the front door incorporates a mullion and transom in the shape of a cross—its detailing borrowed from the Monument of Thrasyllus—within a Greek doorcase **(*Fig 5*)**.

Beyond the sliding front doors is a marble entrance hall with a double staircase **(*Fig 4*)**. In the embrace of the stairs at ground level is a massive bronze fountain designed by Schinkel and a low servants' doorway to the service rooms in the basement of the building. The fountain in place today was actually installed in the 1860s and replaces a much simpler predecessor. The light in this particular section of the palace is striking for its cool, blue hue, emanating from the stained-glass windows inset with six-point stars above the door, also by Schinkel. The design is possibly a borrowing from Italian medieval precedent, such as the vault decoration of Giotto's Scrovegni Chapel, Padua.

This space, which feels like an antechamber of an ancient temple, introduces a series of much more comfortable rooms above. These are homely and informal, rather than palatial. Their furnishings include, for example, Italian *trattoria*-style chairs in the small antechamber to the Crown Prince's study (albeit made of prized chestnut), as well as a needlework sofa embroidered by the Princess herself. It's possible to visualise the family gathered around the central, circular table of the Blue Drawing Room for a game of cards.

Perhaps the most striking interior design in the Charlottenhof, however, is the Tent Room **(*Fig 6*)**. This is ostensibly a guest bedroom in the form of a Roman campaign tent with striped-blue wallpaper and russet →

Fig 6 left: **One of the beds in the Tent Room.** *Fig 7 right:* **The Crown Princess's study, decorated with copies of dancers from Pompeii**

trimmings. There are matching linen curtains, bed canopies and pitched ceiling coverings stretched on frames. It's one in a group of such interiors in palaces across Europe that seem to have been popularised by the Napoleonic wars. Lady Castlereagh, for example, was pictured in such a room during the Congress of Vienna in 1815 for a portrait that now hangs at Mount Stewart, Co Down, Northern Ireland.

The specific source of this example at the Charlottenhof is said to be the Salle de Conseil, one of several tent-like interiors created at Malmaison on the outskirts of Paris (Country Life, *June 24, 2015*). This house was used by Napoleon when he was enjoying the office of First Consul and subsequently became one of his favoured retreats. It was largely the creation of his first wife, the Empress Joséphine, however, who died there in 1814. She had two children, Hortense and Eugène de Beauharnais. Eugène went on to marry Augusta Amalia of Bavaria, who was a half-sister of Elisabeth Ludovika, the wife of the Crown Prince Wilhelm Friedrich.

Augusta Amalia proceeded to decorate a tent room in her own house and, as both sisters remained so close throughout their lives, it is believed that Ludovika emulated her sister's design in this room in the Charlottenhof. Here she incorporated the traditional Bavarian colours of light blue and white, colours that are also used on the external shutters of the villa. Interestingly, this tented-room design was also incorporated by Hortense de Beauharnais in her own home, Schloss Arenenberg, on the shores of Lake Constance.

Another theme of the interior is the art of the Italian Renaissance, in particular the green anteroom hung with an assortment of print reproductions of works by Raphael, da Vinci and Michelangelo. These hangings are original to Schinkel and the Crown Prince's design for the villa. Most notable here is the inclusion of various print reproductions of Raphael's Cartoons, which were full-scale designs for a tapestry commissioned in 1515 by Pope Leo X for the Vatican's Sistine Chapel and depict the lives of the apostles St Peter and St Paul. The print reproductions in the Charlottenhof number various Biblical vignettes, including the Healing of the Lame Man, the Miraculous Draught of Fishes and Paul Preaching at Athens. Raphael's original cartoon is now housed in the V&A Museum in London, where it has been on loan from the Royal Collection since 1865. Its public display was initiated by Queen Victoria, who advocated for the cartoons to be made accessible to a wider audience. Although it is unclear whether the Charlottenhof was ever visited by Prince Albert, the print collection in this antechamber certainly recalls the Nazarene taste that so fascinated him.

Throughout the interiors, Schinkel weaves in colour schemes and furniture inspired by Antiquity. The pink and teal colour scheme in the study of the Crown Princess (***Fig 7***), for example, is borrowed from Pompeii and can be paralleled in the earlier Music Room at Harewood House, West Yorkshire, by Robert Adam. It's possible that the silvering the door and cornice details is a borrowing from German Baroque design. Within the cornice are copies of a Pompeian frieze depicting Bacchic dancers and the room also includes a Roman day-bed.

Even more striking as an evocation of Pliny's Arcadian villas, however, is the furnishing of the central hall overlooking the terrace of the Charlottenhof. Here, Schinkel's tables and chairs are modelled on Roman originals and the walls hung with original 1776 prints by Giovanni Volpato—hand finished in watercolour—after Raphael's celebrated Vatican loggias, thus evoking once more a neo-Classical dialogue between ancient form and Renaissance revival. The only visible betrayal of the late-18th-century farmhouse in this reimagined central hall can be seen in the corner alcoves of the room. As a farmhouse, these alcoves would have contained large porcelain stoves. Hung with brilliant scarlet

Fig 8: **Nobody ever slept in the Charlottenhof, but this bedroom is furnished as if they did. Above is a copy of a Raphael *Transfiguration***

cloth secured with golden clasps and with star-studded blue domes, the alcoves have been repurposed as sculpture niches **(*Fig 3*)**.

Scarlet cloth is also used to face the doors of this room, which is flooded with light from the three floor-to-ceiling doors that open onto the terrace and into Lenné's magnificent gardens. The Doric portico outside the central hall at the Charlottenhof exemplifies Schinkel's masterful adoption of a neo-Pompeian idiom, inspired by excavations at Herculaneum and Pompeii **(*Fig 1*)**.

Within the portico, a sequence of familial likenesses is artfully woven into the decorative scheme of the frescoed walls. Dominating the central west-facing wall is a finely modelled double portrait of Wilhelm and his consort, Elisabeth. These twin visages, executed in pronounced relief, lend a palpable dignity to the composition, their moulding reminiscent of Classical intaglios.

Beneath this principal image are a series of portraits depicting members of the extended royal family—a poignant substitution, perhaps, for the children the royal couple never had. Rendered in a manner that evokes the luminous sheen of enamel, these images, in fact, cunningly emulate Roman relief carvings in gemstone. Among them are likenesses of the Crown Prince's siblings and their respective spouses. Particularly notable is his sister, Princess Charlotte, who, through marriage to Tsar Nicholas I of Russia, assumed the name Alexandra Feodorowna. Also depicted is the Crown Prince's brother, Wilhelm I, future successor to the throne and grandfather to the last German Kaiser, Wilhelm II.

Interspersed among these familial tableaux are vignettes of the royal household, including portraits of ladies-in-waiting to the Crown Princess and esteemed members of the court. Of especial interest is the inclusion of Alexander von Humboldt, naturalist and courtier, who had formerly served as equerry to the Prince. It was with Humboldt that the Crown Prince collaborated to inaugurate a civil division of the Order Pour le Mérite, an honour created to recognise enduring excellence in the realms of science and the Arts. This distinction, which is still awarded today, counts among its eminent recipients Charles Darwin, Giuseppe Verdi, Max Planck and Albert Einstein.

To the south wall of the portico, the painted pantheon extends further, featuring a portrait of Schinkel. He is joined by other trusted advisors to the Crown Prince, among them the adjutant Count Karl von Roeder and the sculptor Christian Daniel Rauch. Although each portrait in the portico is masterfully completed on an individual basis, viewed as a whole this gallery of key players in Wilhelm's life underscores the fusion of dynastic identity with archaeological fantasy.

The concept of 'Sehnsucht' or intense yearning for some kind of distant, or indeed, unknown, ideal, was important to the German Romantic movement. It's an idea that also seems central to the Charlottenhof, where the Crown Prince and his wife—both ardent Romantics—sought informality and the comforts of family life in an idyllic setting. Visiting the villa today, it's still possible to enjoy the sanctuary they craved.

Visit www.spsg.de/en/palaces-gardens

The original—and best? Sean Connery as James Bond in *Dr No* (1962), with Ursula Andress as Honey Ryder

Golden, I

To celebrate finishing *Casino Royale*, Fleming bought an American gold-plated portable Royal Quiet De Luxe typewriter. He asked a friend to bring it to London from New York, adding cryptically 'I will not tell you why I am acquiring this machine'. Each of his subsequent novels was written on the typewriter and, in 1995, it sold at Christies for £55,750 (£96,000 today)

THERE is only one recipe for a bestseller… you have to get the reader to turn over the page,' Ian Fleming once told his editor William Plomer. His own story was full of twists: born into a landed Scottish family in 1908, his childhood ended abruptly when his adored father, the MP Valentine Fleming, was killed by a shell on the Western Front in 1917. Eton and Sandhurst were followed by stints at Reuters and in the City, before he was recruited into Naval Intelligence during the Second World War, where he helped come up with Operation Mincemeat. Afterwards, overseeing foreign correspondents at the *Sunday Times*, he decided to write 'the spy story to end all spy stories'; the plot of an earlier idea, involving a leg of mutton as a murder weapon, had been requisitioned by Roald Dahl after the pair fell out over a woman.

The action hero he dreamt up was shaped by everyone from debonair musician Hoagy Carmichael to Fleming's swashbuckling wartime friend Robert Harling, who later became editor of *House & Garden*.

Ian Fleming shared a taste for smoking, spycraft and stiff drinks with his most famous creation

Fleming lent Bond his taste for cigarettes (custom-made by Mayfair tobacconist Morlands) and stiff drinks, but 'I certainly couldn't keep up with him,' he joked to *Playboy*.

Casino Royale came out in 1953: John Betjeman, who reviewed it for the *Telegraph*, found it gripping, but wasn't sure about the 'rather physical love story'. Seven books later, all written on annual leave from his day job, Fleming was beginning to get fed up with 'that ass Bond'. Then, in 1961, John F. Kennedy revealed that *From Russia, With Love* was one of his favourite books, sending American sales skyrocketing.

Weeks later, Fleming signed a film deal with Harry Saltzman and Cubby Broccoli. He didn't get to enjoy his success for long: he died in August 1964, after a heart attack, aged only 56, on the 12th birthday of his son Caspar, who he had nicknamed 003-and-a-half. *EH*

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Zinging in the rain

Every season brings with it distinctive scents to tantalise our senses. **Laura Parker** breathes in deeply

SPRING is when the meadows are 'washed fragrant' and freshness is breathed over the hills, writes John Clare in *Spring Morning*. It is a season when we are led by our noses, from the delicate rawness of the first snowdrops to the full-on hit of a newly wet pavement after an April shower.

Flowers are the most obvious scent-bearers and the earliest to perfume our hedges, from February onwards, is the almondy blackthorn blossom. The daffodil is the most recognisable harbinger of spring, but its fragrance can divide opinion. Even delicately scented *Narcissus jonquilla* may quickly tend towards the overripe, its feculence provided by a compound called indole, which is also found in jasmine. Later in the season, we readily sniff out another distinctive odour in damper copses—wild garlic (*Allium ursinum*). Pungent yet delicious, it is one of the easiest of foraging plants to identify: simply crush a green leaf to conjure the base notes of pesto or aioli. It can also verge on overpowering. By the time the long, green leaves wilt, we're more than ready to embrace the warm, parma-violet-and-honey scent of the bluebell, *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, on our woodland walks.

> 'The signature scent of spring comes not from beautiful blooms, but benevolent bugs'

Flowery fragrances are not designed to please us, although scent can have an astonishing effect on our brains, helping us to sleep (lavender), improving memory (peppermint) and calming us (roses). No, flowers have a baser motive, which is to attract pollinators. A scientist will explain that the pleasing, heady scent filling your nose is, in fact, merely a carbon-based compound. In her book *Good Nature*, Prof Kathy Willis, Baroness Willis of Summertown, explains that plants release these volatile organic compounds as a gaseous cloud and that scent cells are found not only in flowerheads, but in leaves, bark and sap.

The signature scent of spring comes not from beautiful blooms, but benevolent bugs. The technical term for the smell produced when rain falls on dry ground is 'petrichor' (*'Sweet with the evening rain', August 3, 2022*). It's a pleasing word (*see box*) and an odour that stirs us deeply. Yet it is made by a simple organism, as Paul Hoskisson, professor of molecular microbiology at the University of Strathclyde, explains: 'Petrichor describes geosmin, one of the natural products made by bacteria, fungi and plants to influence their environments. Geosmin is made by the soil-dwelling *Streptomyces* →

Below: **Natural selection: herbal and floral ingredients bolster our beauty products.** *Facing page:* **The almond aroma of blackthorn blossom is in the air from February**

Getty; Alamy

Above: **Freshly mown grass is hard to top as *the* scent of summer.** *Below:* **Don't forget—a whiff of mint is said to augment the memory**

bacteria to attract small invertebrates called springtails (*Collembola*) to distribute their spores, in the same way that plants entice animals and insects to disperse pollen and seeds. *Streptomyces* produce the spores when it's dry or food is scarce—and also make antibiotics to protect their nutrients from competitors. Because geosmin is a volatile compound, it easily turns into a gas on contact with water, which is why we're most aware of it when it rains.'

Humans are phenomenally sensitive to geosmin and can detect it at levels as minute as five parts per trillion. Although we have harnessed the *Streptomyces* bacteria to great effect—they account for some two-thirds of our antibiotics and antifungals and have been used in immunosuppressants, herbicides and cancer drugs—there is, as yet, no obvious commercial use for geosmin, advises Prof Hoskisson. In the meantime, we can delight in it when digging the garden, ploughing the fields or kicking through woodland mulch.

Geosmin accounts both for the earthy taste of beetroot and the muddy flavour of river fish, but, like liberally applied teenage aftershave, it can overwhelm. It is a problem if it taints our drinking water and even more so if it hangs over the surface of the UK's largest freshwater lake, as those living near blue-green-algae-ridden Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland can attest.

If spring can be captured in florals and essence of earth, summer brings with it an evergreen favourite. Freshly cut grass is luscious and new-mown hay is more delicious still. Drying sweet vernal grass, a main ingredient of traditional meadow hay, produces a chemical known as coumarin. This closely resembles vanilla, which is deemed to have one of the most pleasing effects on our olfactory receptors. The Victorians became obsessed with it after the discovery that coumarin could be extracted from the beans of the South American tonka tree. 'Hay' was the fashionable scent of choice for cosmetics and perfumes and the craze continued after 1868, when chemist Sir William Henry Perkin worked out how to synthesise coumarin from coal tar.

> 'The sensation that famously enraptured Marcel Proust was a madeleine dipped in *tilleul*'

It was another delicious summer scent that so enraptured Marcel Proust. Smell can strongly stimulate memory and the sensation that famously enraptured the French writer was a madeleine dipped in *tilleul*, an infusion made from the delicately scented flowers of the lime tree.

When autumn comes around, the hard-working bacteria go into overtime, producing more geosmin as leaves rot down. To the rich smells of crumbling dark earth we can add bonfire smoke and bracken, as an overcome Edward Thomas did in his poem *Digging*: 'Today I think/Only with scents.' Time spent in forests is known to improve our wellbeing, but the link between Nature, our incredible sense of smell and its impact

Scent to sleep: the calming perfume of lavender flowers is used to promote relaxation

on our health is still a relatively under-studied field that is now being tackled by scientists at Oxford University's Centre for Nature Recovery.

Winter brings a different aromatic experience. As frost pinches and piques our nostrils, some people are sure they can smell snow. In fact, what they are sensing is an *absence* of smell. Snow transforms the landscape and disguises our usual scent references; meanwhile, cold air molecules move more slowly and plants release fewer aromas.

The rarified palette of the Nordic landscape helped Sámi-Norwegian artist Máret Ánne Sara single out the smells of a childhood spent among reindeer herders for her current exhibition at London's Tate Modern, SE1 (running until April 6, 020–7887 8888; www.tate.org.uk). Working with Algerian perfumer Nadjib Achaibou, she created two scents: one that of reindeer under extreme stress ('fear'), the other based on natives such as lichen and shoegrass ('hope'). These fragrances waft from solid polymer blocks fixed to a walk-through installation in the shape of the internal anatomy of a reindeer's nose.

Incorporating scent within exhibitions is a growing trend. London-based food historian and artist Tasha Marks has recreated the smell of Marie Antoinette's rouge and powder, as well as that of her dank prison cell, for 'Marie Antoinette Style' at the V&A Museum, SW7 (until March 22, 020–7942 2000; www.vam.ac.uk). Ms Marks frequently draws upon the natural world in her work—take the 2021 'Tranquillity' exhibition at north London's Wellcome Collection, NW1. 'I was asked to create the smell of happiness,' she recalls. 'It was a forest floor full of petrichor: damp, dark and green.' She has most recently developed fragrances for the Ashmolean Museum Oxford's exhibition 'In Bloom: How Plants Changed Our World', which runs from March 19–August 16 (01865 278000; www.ashmolean.org). Worth sniffing out.

A little common scents

- Petrichor sounds ancient—stemming from the Greek for stone (*petra*) and the fluid in the veins of the gods (*ichor*)—but the word was actually coined by Australian scientists in the 1960s
- Sillage is the trail of perfume a person leaves behind them, from the French word for the wake of a boat
- Machair is found in coastal grassy areas in the west of Scotland and has a distinctive scent of wildflowers and sea-washed sand
- If you can get your tongue around Gaelic, try this: *fàileadh cùbhraidh a' mhonaidh air latha blàth samhraidh*—the pleasant smell of the hills on a warm summer's day

Fallen heroes: the tang that accompanies a tramp through wet autumn woods comes courtesy of geosmin, which also creates petrichor

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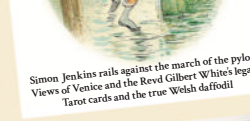
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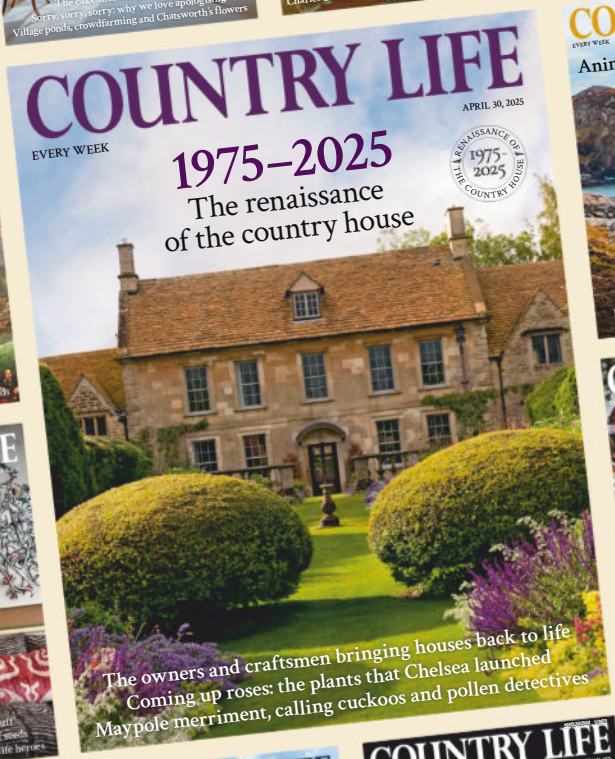
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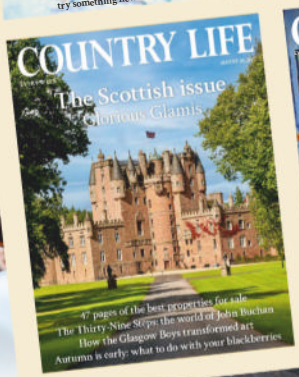
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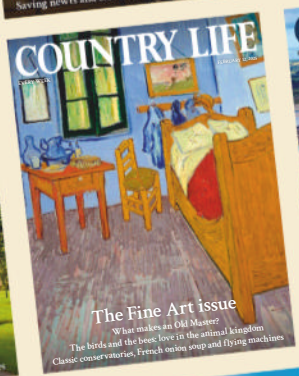
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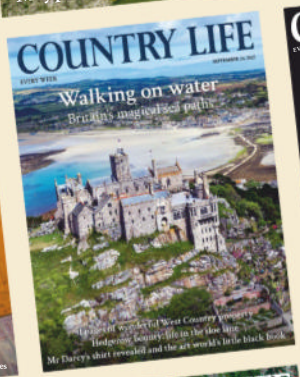
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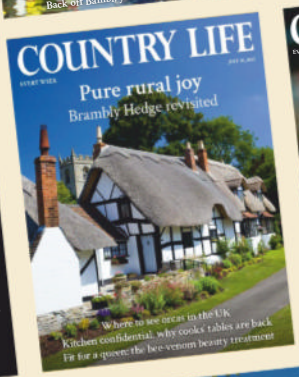
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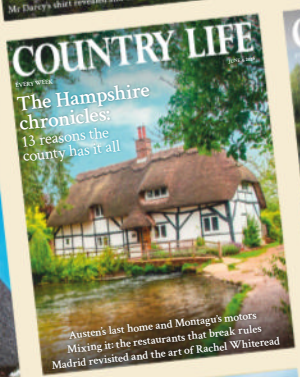
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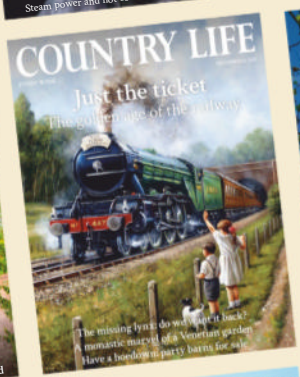
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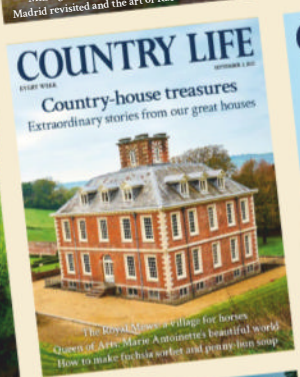
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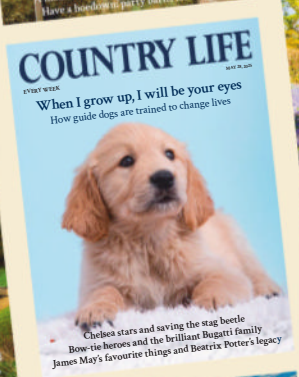
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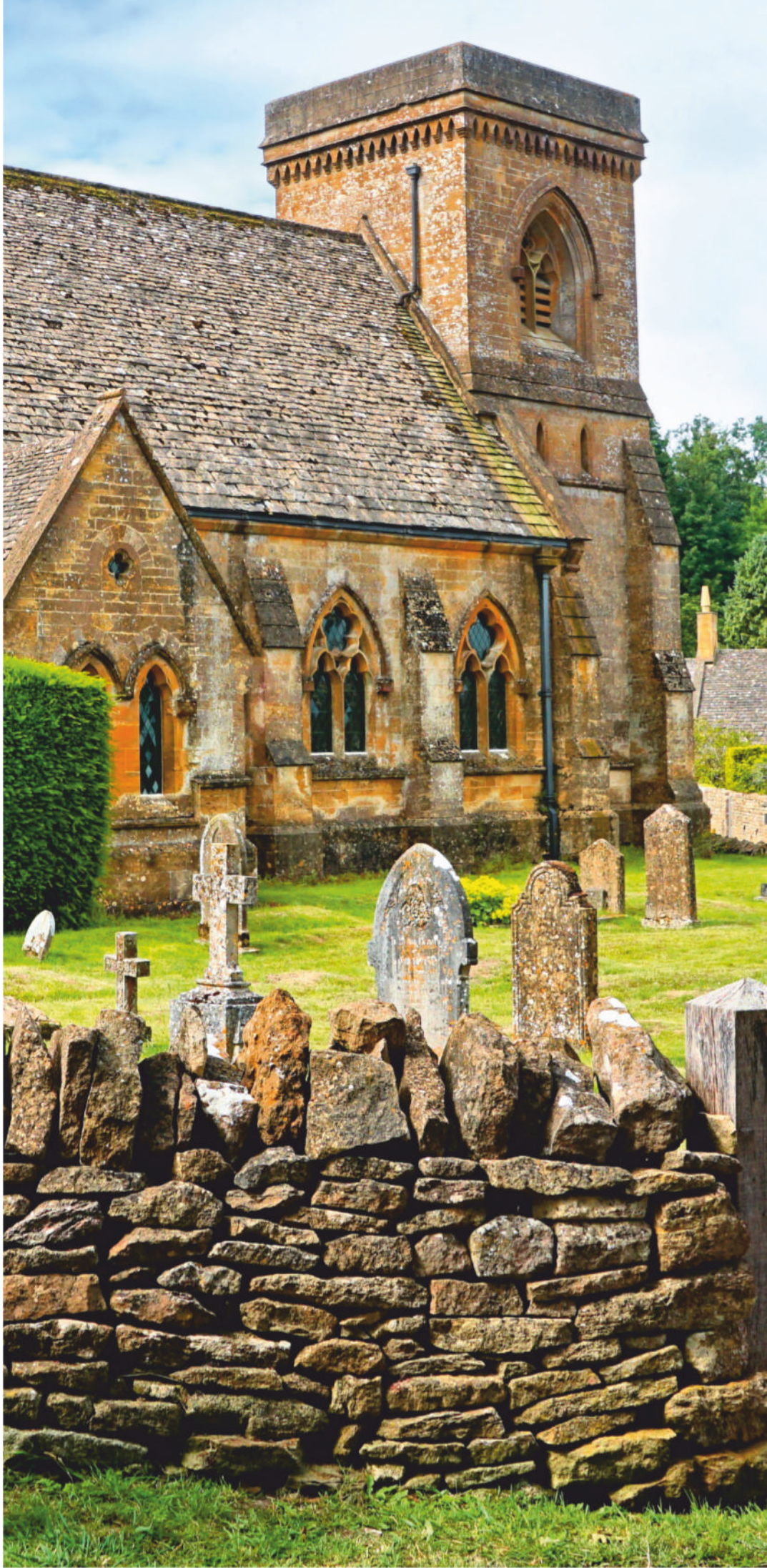
PAY a visit to London's Covent Garden and you'll spot an immediately recognisable quintet watching over the shoppers: five K2 telephone kiosks in splendid crimson overcoats. They are almost always thronged with people—not looking to make calls, but keen to photograph these icons of British design. The K2, Britain's first all-red telephone kiosk, made its debut 100 years ago and, although it has since been eclipsed by mobile technology, its appeal remains undimmed.

Tucked inside the arched entrance of the Royal Academy's Burlington House in Piccadilly, W1, the original timber prototype (designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott) stands to attention. This stately telephone box marked a growing belief in the importance of good public design, making amends for its unpopular predecessor, the K1, a design Eastbourne Council in East Sussex deemed so ugly that it thatched its seafront boxes, only to create a hideous hybrid: a concrete kiosk in a wig. The K2 had loftier aspirations, taking the cuboid form and domed roof of the family tomb designed by the architect Sir John Soane (*The legacy, April 17, 2024*) as its inspiration. Each side featured a Tudor crown, which doubled as ventilation, and the teak door had a handle of nickel-plated bronze.

> 'A craze for "phone box stuffing" involved piling in as many people as possible'

'The K2 was the distillation of the essence of Classicism' and responded to the perceived 'chaos, degradation and unbridled individualism of the Victorian city,' declared the architectural historian Gavin Stamp in his 1989 book *Telephone Boxes*. 'It was a rare and special moment in British history, when both public authorities and industrial concerns strove to commission designs of high quality. Variety and showiness were eschewed in favour of uniformity, reticence and elegance.'

The K2 demonstrated huge attention to detail, featuring a parcel shelf, ashtray and mirror. Coins were inserted in the 'A' slot, and change was given via 'B'. Children found it irresistible to nip inside and push the B button in the hope of retrieving a coin or sweep the collecting tray with their fingertips. My own father-in-law was one of them. 'On one occasion, we got a half crown,' he recalls, still savouring the victory. A hefty telephone book →



A rhapsody in red: no rural British village is complete without a beaming telephone box

A study in scarlet

One hundred years ago, the first all-red telephone box, designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, was installed in London. **Deborah Nicholls-Lee** lifts the receiver on a very British icon

on a chain had pranksters targeting the silliest surnames, whereas a 1950s craze for 'phone box stuffing' involved piling in as many people as possible. The record? Twenty-five.

However, the red kiosks were by no means an immediate hit. 'When the first phone boxes were painted the true Post Office red, there was a bit of a stink, especially in rural communities: they were a little bit of a blot on the landscape,' says Carl Burge, whose Norfolk-based business Remember When UK has been restoring vintage telephone kiosks for 25 years. A concession was made for areas of outstanding natural beauty by painting the glazing bars battleship grey. However, joyful red—selected by the Post Office so that the kiosks, so crucial in an emergency, were as easy to identify as post boxes—triumphed in the end, winning a place in our hearts. 'Now, we praise them when we see them all fully restored and looking glorious,' observes Mr Burge.

> 'Synth-pop band OMD made a Merseyside phone box their temporary office'

In a survey conducted by Kingston University in 2015, the K2 telephone box was voted the best British design by 39% of participants, beating the Routemaster double-decker bus, the Spitfire and the Rolls-Royce. 'They are so quintessentially British, aren't they?' remarks Mr Burge. 'These things used to be on every street corner. It was our way of communicating. They've been through the war; they've been through good times and bad times. If these phone boxes could talk, what a story they'd tell.'

Although handsome, the K2 weighed in at a hulking 1¼ tons, so variations soon followed. The cream and red concrete K3 (1929) was too brittle to enjoy longevity and its lightweight lookalike, the K5 (1933), was scrapped before it made production. Between them, the chunky K4 (1930), nicknamed the vermillion giant, asserted itself, replete with a post box and stamp vending machine, but its size and the need for access to both front and back required a rethink. The most successful was the K6, introduced in huge numbers as part of George V's Silver Jubilee celebrations and 90 years old this year.

One of its biggest fans is Paul Bottomly, who, since 2019, has photographed and catalogued 6,600 kiosks as part of the K6 Project, a personal mission to visit almost every K6. His quest has taken him from the Warwickshire village of Withybrook, not far from his home, whose phone box first caught his eye,

Ringing endorsement: one of the most popular designs is the K6 telephone kiosk, designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott 90 years ago to mark George V's Silver Jubilee

to the Outer Hebrides ('It felt like I was on the edge of the world'). 'For me, it's looking back at a simpler time,' he says.

Pop stars from David Bowie to One Direction have also expressed enthusiasm for this scarlet patrimony, featuring it on their album covers. Synth-pop band OMD even made a Merseyside phone box its temporary office, dedicating its 1980 song *Red Frame White Light* to it. The public uproar when, in 2017, the phone box was removed saw it reinstated within weeks.

Cinema, too, has paid tribute to the phone box, particularly in the 1980s. In *Gregory's Girl* (1981), directed by Bill Forsyth, it enjoys a brief cameo as a changing room, but, in his comedy-drama *Local Hero* (1983), Mr Forsyth brought it to the fore, making a lone kiosk in a fictional village on Scotland's west coast an oil executive's only line of communication with his Texan office—a reminder of its sanctity in times past. Lest we idealise the phone box, John Cleese's comedically frustrating encounter with a series of poorly functioning phone boxes in *Clockwise* (1986), directed by Christopher Morahan, reminds us that it was not without flaws.

It was during this period that the red kiosks were first threatened, when the newly privatised BT announced a modernisation programme that would replace them, misjudging the public mood. Even the advent of the mobile phone could not persuade people to part with their red phone boxes and, in 2008, BT launched the Adopt a Kiosk scheme, allowing councils to become their custodians for only £1. The renovated kiosks continue to serve their communities, but thanks to

Getty; Mary Evans Picture Library; TopFoto

Call of duty: a beloved box is given a makeover by locals in 1964, decades before Adopt a Kiosk was dreamt up

the nation's ingenuity, are now defibrillator cases, for example, or cash machines, ice-cream parlours, galleries and libraries.

Restoring a telephone box involves 'stripping it right back to its bare bones, to cast iron, as if it's just come back from the foundry… then you'll see the crowns and the castings come to life,' explains Mr Burge, who compares the meticulous process to 'building bodywork on a classic car'. One of his projects now stands on the ninth tee of a golf course so patrons can order their bar meals. Others include a community seed exchange, a recording booth and a shower. Converting kiosks into loos he deems 'a little bit barbaric', but he was ecstatic when asked to renovate a K2 at the former home of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott: a full-circle moment that he describes as a 'real honour'.

Boxing clever

The survival of our beloved red telephone kiosks owes much to the campaign group The Thirties Society (now The 20th Century Society), established in 1979 to preserve post-1914 patrimony. The organisation, whose founder members included Gavin Stamp, launched the Take it as Red campaign, which galvanised local authorities keen to keep, in Stamp's words, these 'visible symbols of Britain'. 'The utilitarian need not be ugly,' he insisted in *Telephone Boxes*. These kiosks show 'how sensitive, dignified and, yes, beautiful street furniture can be'. As telephone boxes had no legal protection, the organisation successfully petitioned for the statutory listing of about 3,000 kiosks as miniature buildings. It's been 40 years since the first kiosk was listed, a cream and red K3 overlooking London Zoo's penguins, but the fight continues to conserve them. Only last year, villagers in Sharrington, Norfolk, successfully saved their red phone box by queuing up to use it to meet BT's minimum requirement of 52 calls a year.

Mark Cocker

A ghost in the gloaming

The spectral emergence of a barn owl, silently drifting across the sky at dusk, is one of Britain's most magical sights. We must treasure their dwindling numbers

HERE'S a pleasant thought experiment: close your eyes and imagine dusk descending on these islands, one place after another. Now, conjure an image, all over Britain—from Caithness to Cornwall—of thousands of barn owls all emerging to hunt, as the light fades in your mind.

You could even expand the vision to embrace much of the world, because this is the most widespread owl on earth, occurring equally from Mombasa to Mumbai, Santiago to San Francisco, Beirut to Bilbao. Across six continents, barn owls live alongside us and bear upon their backs the same grace, beauty and twilit mystery. Barn-owl flight is without sound and seemingly without effort. Passages of easy wingbeats alternate with floating interludes, as a bird sifts the ground below for signs of any unsuspecting rodent. Best of all is if their attention is riveted to one spot, when the owl slows to a standstill and, in the last light, hovers like an enormous pale moth. No wonder it was once known as the 'white owl'. Yet the plumage also involves subtler tawny-buff or grey upper parts and the pale undersides are touched with ginger. The most singular feature is a heart-shaped disc around the black eyes that gives a barn owl's face an almost spectral quality—the French name is *chouette effraie* or 'scary owl'. The structure also has a function: channelling sound to the bird's ear cavities and enhancing its astonishing auditory powers. In laboratory conditions of total darkness, barn owls can catch mice using only their hearing.

The species is well named, given that, in Britain, it is adapted to agricultural landscapes of many types, including the arable areas of southern England, but also more rugged pasture as far north as Scotland's Aberdeenshire and Highlands, where the species reaches the northern limit of its global range. Many farmed environments may be suitable, but a prerequisite for breeding is the presence of suitable nest cavities. At one time, hollow trees and rocky niches would have met those needs, but for millennia people have supplemented such opportunities, not only with barns, but also churches, windmills, castles and ancient ruins. In Sweden, it is known as the *tornuggla* or 'tower owl'. Nor do they have to be permanent structures; a wooden lean-to will sometimes suffice.

More recently, people have erected purpose-built nestboxes on poles, especially in treeless coastal tracts. The measures reflect our concern for a much-loved resident. In fact, when the British were polled recently to elect their national bird, the barn owl was a respectable runner-up to the robin. Those affections may have acquired a keener edge because of the disastrous declines in barn-owl numbers. Since an estimate, in the 1930s, of 12,000 breeding pairs, the national total has fallen by two-thirds. Despite this, a raft of positive measures, including the erection of thousands of new nest boxes, has allowed the barn owl to recover lost parts of its range and bounce back from the effects of bad weather. I well recall a dead bird found near our home one winter. It looked perfect except for the breast bone, which ran beneath the soft feathers, almost like a blade, suggesting the poor bird had slowly starved.

> 'Passages of easy wingbeats alternate with floating interludes'

The downside of those soft, soundless feathers is that the plumage lacks proper proofing against rain and barn owls struggle to hunt in prolonged wet spells. Mercifully, they have strategies to help the population recover. They lay 4–6 eggs and, if the food supply is good, they will have two broods. One positive consequence of so many hungry chicks is that parents are obliged to hunt night *and* day.

I offer finally a sighting I will never forget. It was an owl hunting throughout a whole June morning. Back and forth it patrolled, swooping repeatedly and almost always rising with fresh voles. Without a moment's rest, the busy parent flew to a distant barn, where I could imagine the resulting scene: several innocent, downy heads all raised at once, beaks wide open, ready for breakfast.

The heart-shaped face of Britain's beloved barn owl is a bright spot to light up the dying of any day

Getty

John Lewis-Stempel

Five, six, pick up sticks

Like a squirrel or a jay caching nuts, **John Lewis-Stempel** wanders the woods collecting fallen boughs for the fire, an exercise in freedom and self-reliance unchanged since the Stone Age

Illustration by Michael Frith

I WENT up to the wood in the mid afternoon, towing a trailer in order to collect kindling and some convenient fallen boughs, which, in the crank of a chainsaw, could be converted into logs for the fire. On my daily trips through the wood, whether promenading the dogs or taking 'deery' short cuts to check the sheep, I make piles of small sticks or haul branches to convenient pick-up spots; a little like a squirrel or a jay caching nuts (and, a little like a squirrel or a jay, I sometimes forget where I've stashed the haul).

In the gathering of firewood, I find myself in connection with my peasant self or an even older iteration of humanity. The gratis of the gathered wood is a satisfaction beyond the obvious thrift. Pick up sticks for the fire, rather than purchasing a sack of nylon-netted kindling from the service-station forecourt, and you are a little less the slave of the consumer society.

> 'Yew is full and fulsome in flame, but the cutting of it is a challenge'

The liberation politics of scrumping firewood are older still. The peasants of medieval England were generally banned from cutting down trees for the hovel fire. Indeed, in my native Hereford, John Gilbert, the bishop, excommunicated in 1383 any persons who cut down live trees from a local wood. Peasants were primarily permitted only dead wood for the home fire and then only that which they could retrieve with a shepherd's crook or a weeding hook—hence the expression 'by hook or by crook'. The foraging of firewood, nonetheless, enabled the peasants to be a little less dependent on their manorial lords.

As every wood-gatherer in history has understood, with every picked-up stick comes the feeling of freedom and self-reliance. Wood was humanity's first serious fuel. The Stone Agers' campfire, apart from keeping the tribe warm in hostile climes and times, kept predators at bay and enabled the cooking of food, which is easier for the body to digest. Cooking, especially of animal and fish flesh, fuelled our evolution, giving us bigger brains (see, for example, Katherine Zink and Daniel Lieberman's article *Impact of meat and Lower Palaeolithic food processing techniques on chewing in humans*). When the Stone Agers went scouring for the arboreal means to fuel flame, they found a way to break free from the natural order, to become predator, not prey.

The serial scavenger of firewood knows this: one develops the dispassionate and honed ability to scan the wood for the pickings, as the morning buzzard circling over the meadow assimilates and computes information to find the kill. Perhaps the raptors know, too, the crude emotional rapaciousness on discovering plenty; last autumn, a berserk storm from the Norse north hacked off branches galore and my response at the sight of the morning's carnage was to rub my hands in glee. I may have even licked my lips.

A January wood in the afternoon is sequences in sombreness and today was no different. There was the bone-bareness of the trees, their once lively leaves long since fallen to a slimy rot you tread on with wariness; the shriek of the jaybird pinballing around the stony oak trunks; the three necklaces of ruby-red bryony berries suspended in the hazel, as if their wearers had dissolved into wraiths or Fates; and the suspicion of mist gathering. Then, the wolf-gnarl of a chainsaw to set human teeth on edge.

At one point, I was deep in the wood, pillars of trees all surrounding, and I wondered for one unsecured second whether the wood, like winter, was endless. I bent to my task of wood-gleaning again and became absorbed in the reassurance of work. The wood pieces I handled, one by one, gained a hyper-realism of texture and clarity, becoming exhibits in a conveyor-display in my own museum. I felt the braille of bark in my fingers: the satin-smoothness of hazel; the harsh, long-ridged tiles of oak; the peeling, leprotic skin of silver birch. I beheld a stump of oak, the bark-shell of which came apart to show the carved runes of bark beetles.

I tugged a stag-headed branch of oak from its marooning on a heap of scrap-wire bramble. Although spindly, the rain-blacked oak was its own weight in lead. What had once strived to reach to the sky now writhed as sculpture on the ground.

Yet the oak branch was not without life. The last 6ft, when pulled into plain sight, was covered in yellow, as if it had been dipped in a dish of egg yolk. The fungus responsible, *Tremelia mesenterica*, is colloquially known as witches' butter, the cognomen capturing its oddity and its colour when gold and newborn, but not its shape. Far from being smooth-spread, this is either, when youthful, a rugby player's cauliflower ear or, when elderly, a browned, splattered mini omelette. I sawed off the yolky-yellow end of the branch and re-placed it on the woodland floor. After all, when gathering fallen wood for the home fire, you need to leave much behind to be a home for Nature.

Finally, this: in the years of gathering kindling and logs, my knowledge about British firewood has seasoned and this is its order of merit. Ash, sappy or dry, makes white-hot wood. Apple, cherry, pear and willow are all sweetly fragrant. Oak is slow and solid burning like coal, and similarly acrid. Yew is full and fulsome in flame, but the cutting of it is a challenge, even for mechanical saws. Beech burns clean and bright. Silver birch is flaming mad, pyromaniacal. Holly will burn green and bright; lime is fast to flame, meaning it requires endless replenishing in the hearth; and Scots pine is a spitty firestarter, a continuing fire-aid, but, when heaped, may set the chimney alight.

John Lewis-Stempel was twice crowned victor of the Wainwright Prize for Nature writing, for 'Where Poppies Blow' and 'Meadowland'. His latest book is 'Night Life: Exploring Britain's Wild Landscapes After Dark' (Penguin, £12.99)

David Profumo

Here comes the sun

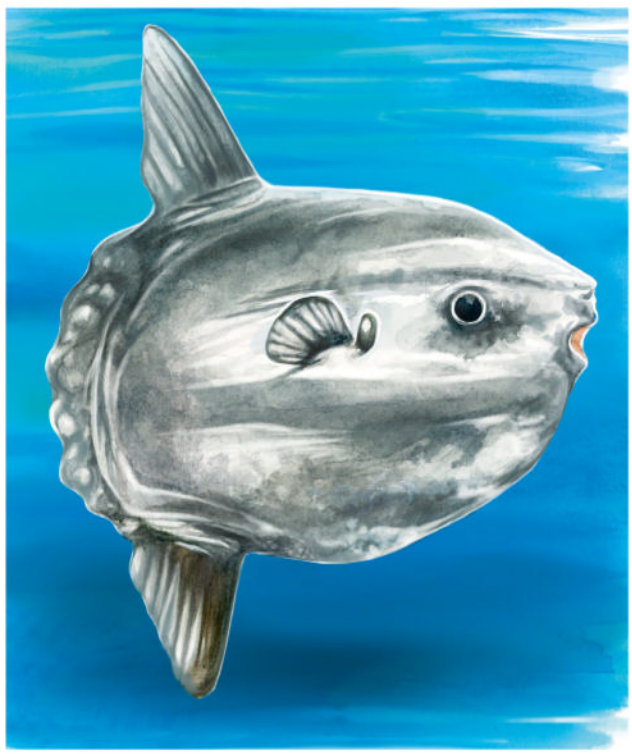
Known for lying on the surface 'sunning itself', the parasite-infested ocean sunfish is an enthusiastic jellivore that gobbles up jellyfish, together with the occasional plastic bag

Illustration by Fiona Osbaldstone

A HIGH-SEAS drifter and occasional visitor to our shores, the ocean sunfish (*Mola mola*) is the second largest teleost, or bony fish, on the planet—eclipsed only by its cousin the bumphead sunfish (*M. alexandrini*). It can weigh up to a ton and has a weirdly amputated appearance, with a huge, boffin-like head, two exaggerated fins and seemingly no tail. This harmless example of marine megafauna enjoys a sparse circumglobal distribution from Iceland to Chile and is one of a handful of members of the *Molidae* family, named after the Latin for 'millstone'.

Its habit of lying on the surface, apparently sunning itself, gives rise to the English name and the fish may indeed be indulging in thermal recharging after deep feeding dives—or else exposing itself for sea birds to remove skin parasites (one ichthyologist terms sunfish 'parasite hotels'). Its disc shape has also earned the nickname 'poisson lune' and it is alleged to glow with phosphorescence at night, although the appellation 'moon fish' has already been bagged by the lovely and delicious opah or Jerusalem haddock. Stranded specimens, which may be enfeebled or sick and therefore not in representative oceanic condition, are said to utter plaintive groans.

The eggs are buoyant and multitudinous—the ovaries of one immense female were estimated to hold some 300 million of them. The larvae are covered in spines and grow rapidly: surviving hatchlings can increase their weight 60 million times before attaining the adult maximum. One sun kept in a Californian aquarium grew from 60lb to 900lb in only 15 months. Frank Buckland, the Victorian naturalist and omnivore, made a plaster cast of his specimen, caught off Folkestone in Kent, which was so heavy he had to enlist the help of passing dustmen to extricate it from his dissecting room (the carcase was fed to pigs). In New Zealand, where it is pleasingly known as Ratahuihui, suns have been taken measuring 9ft long and 10ft deep; indeed, Zane Grey (that intrepid dentist turned best-selling author) preserved one of similar size for the American Museum of Natural History.



With a teeny brain, oar-like fins and a tutu for a truncated tail, the slimy, cartilaginous sunfish is one of the ocean's strangest creatures

> 'The ovaries of one immense female held 300 million eggs'

The skin is hard like shagreen, but covered in thick slime and there are dense layers of subcutaneous fat. Its back is dark, with greyish flanks and silvery ripple markings. The eye is protected by a well-developed nictitating membrane and is relatively small for a creature of this size, rather as a pilot's cockpit windshield seems miniscule compared with the bulk of its fuselage. In his book *Blues* (1987), John Hersey describes its 'tiny thumb-sucker's mouth', which is equipped with a single, fused beak-like tooth on each jaw—a feature of the Plectognath order, which includes pufferfish and the notorious *fugu*.

Mola mola enjoys a very slow metabolism and is an enthusiastic jellivore, gobbling up jellyfish, salps, ctenophores and brittlestars. Its sphincter sports five radiating retractor muscles. Hazards at sea include ingesting plastic bags and falling foul of ships' propellers.

The sunfish brain is tiny: that of a 450-pounder weighed in at a mere 1½oz. Its bones are chiefly cartilaginous, making for a stiff bodily structure. The spine is astonishingly short and a specimen weighing 1½ tons contained a backbone only three-fifths of an inch long. Holy Mola!

Nobody really knows how long these enigmatic fish can live and their lifestyle remains a considerable mystery; big suns swim solo and obtaining sufficient scientific specimens remains a challenge. It used to be thought that they were weak swimmers, passively roaming the oceans at the mercy of wind and tide, but recent tagging programmes have established that they frequently dive to great depths and their cruising speed is similar to that of a yellowfin tuna.

Sunfish possess rounded pectorals, but no pelvic fins; the anal and dorsal are confluent and positively enormous, acting like oars and propulsion being achieved by a kind of synchronised, side-to-side sculling motion. The torso terminates abruptly, but, in fact, they do carry a leathery, vestigial tail comprising fused lobes crimped like a pasty or tutu—technically, a bridge or gephyroceral tail. There is no air bladder.

Occasionally harpooned for its oil content (to confuse matters, sunfish is a moniker for basking sharks off the west coast of Ireland), sunfish meat is generally considered insipid, although it is valued in Japan for soups. During the Edo period, *manbō* were sometimes offered in lieu of tax payments to shoguns. The flesh, however, is typically infested with parasitic copepods and worm cysts, so, if a sun washed up on your desert island, you might not want to choose it as one of your discs.

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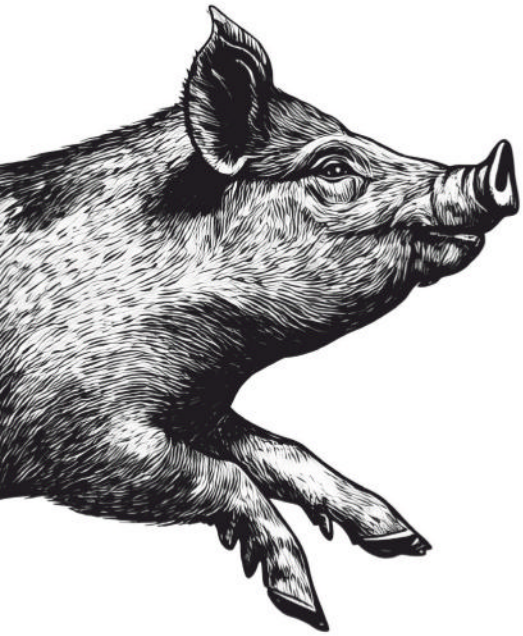


Offaly good

Forget fillet and pass on plastic-wrapped cuts: taking a nose-to-tail approach to dining offers the ultimate in magnificent, fully immersive eating, advocates **Tom Parker Bowles**

NOSE-TO-TAIL-EATING" means it would be disingenuous to the animal not to make the most of the whole beast; there is a set of delights, textural and flavoursome, which lie beyond the fillet.' So writes Fergus Henderson—oracle of offal, high priest of 'umbles and the chef behind London's legendary St John restaurant—in his 1999 classic, *Nose to Tail Eating: A Kind of British Cooking*. And although Mr Henderson has done so much to champion what the Americans call, in their coyly euphemistic way, 'variety meats', he's the first to admit that eating the whole beast is only plain common sense. 'Once an animal has been killed you would be foolish not to make the best use of every single delicious part,' he says. 'It is simply the right thing to do.'

> 'This is all about gentle flavours and textures both toothsome and tender'

Amen to that. Because offal (the bits that literally fell off the carcass in the butchery process) is more sinned against than sinning, not only cheap and packed full of nutrients, but a sumptuous feast of flavour and texture, too.

In most parts of the world, it's a delicacy, rather than a thing of disgust, something to be worshipped and adored. From Mexican *menudo* (spicy tripe stew) and Turkish *kokoreç* (offal skewers) to Greek *magiritsa* (offal soup), Roman *rigatoni con la pajata* (baby calf's intestine in tomato sauce) and South Korean *gopchang jeongol* (another spicy tripe stew)—not to mention the dozens of regional Chinese dishes filled with pig's intestines, trotters, hearts, lungs and all the

Never to be discarded: ox hearts deserve a place at the finest of dining establishments

'Weel are ye wordy of a grace/As lang's my arm': Burns's paean to the noble haggis could be addressed to any manner of 'umbles

rest—this is all about gentle flavours and textures both toothsome and tender.

St John may have elevated tripe, tongue, bone marrow, kidneys and ox heart from cheap bit players to A-list superstars, as well as inspiring a new generation of offal-obsessed chefs, but it wasn't as if they were reinventing the wheel—rather re-embracing a great British culinary tradition.

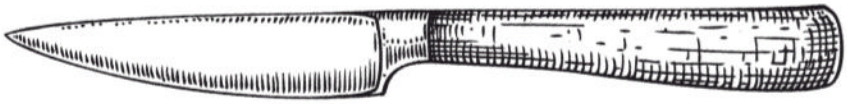
Back in the days before electricity, refrigeration and sanitised, plastic-wrapped pieces of bland chicken breast, it was the organs, trotters, ears and cheeks that were the greatest treat of all. They had to be devoured sharpish, too, before going rancid.

Black pudding would be made with fresh pig's blood and ox hearts stuffed and baked, or chopped up, mixed with pig's liver, belly and breadcrumbs and then wrapped in caul (the lacy membrane that encases the animal's internal organs) to make faggots. An East Anglian pig's fry consisted of liver, kidney, melt (or spleen), belly, heart and brain, cut into tiny pieces, rolled in seasoned flour, baked and served with a thick gravy. Sheep lungs, hearts and livers would be forced into a cleaned sheep stomach, alongside oatmeal, onion and suet, and made into haggis. Calves' feet were boiled to make jelly, cow heel stewed, tongue and ox cheeks transformed into brawn, served with a pungent mustard sauce. Tripe was simmered in milk with onions, boar's head (a great Christmas delicacy) pickled, deboned and stuffed with forcemeat, steamed then glazed. Sheep's trotters (especially up north) were stewed with onion and carrot trimmings, battered and deep fried. Nothing was wasted, as the old saying goes, save the oink, moo or baa.

These days, however, offal is more culinary cuss than exquisite mouthful, something to be feared, abhorred and avoided. It's not only the texture that puts people off (the texture that we 'umbles lovers so adore), but the very thought of offal. 'Brains are for zombies,' said my son with pinched-face disgust, as I tucked into a plate of calf's brains, swimming in a nutty brown butter. They have the texture of set custard, and a bland, gentle richness that soothes and cossets. Although they may seem visceral, bloody and barbaric, prepared properly, they're anything but. Not that any of this matters to the offal deniers, who can barely bring themselves to look upon the organ, let alone devour it.

Even some of my more adventurous friends, who have no problem gobbling sea urchin, stinky tofu or *natto* (fermented soybeans) go green at the mere mention of liver. I blame school. Because it was here, when our tender palates were still developing, that we were forced to ingest a pallid lump of overcooked organ, riddled with veins and sinister tubes. Kidneys were worse still, cooked until they had the consistency of rubber bullets and smelling as if they'd just been fished out of the communal urinal. Steak and kidney pudding for lunch was a dark day for all. Leopold Bloom, the protagonist of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, →

A knightly treat: guest editor Sir David Beckham chose calf's liver and bacon as his favourite dish



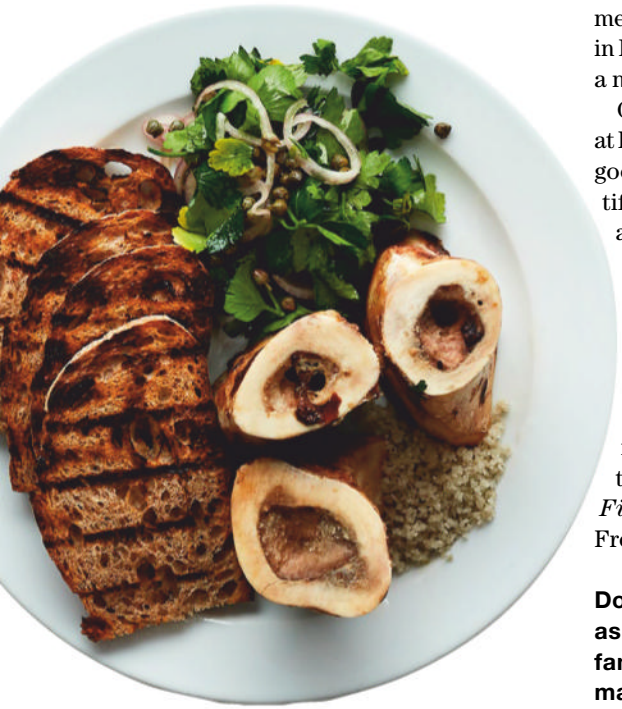
Getty; StockFood; Simon Buck/Country Life Picture Library; Sam A. Harris

may have eaten 'with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls', but few shared his taste for 'grilled mutton kidneys which gave to his plate a fine tang of faintly scented urine'. Little wonder an entire generation took against offal from such an early age.

'Who can resist a pair of plump devilled kidneys, glistening lobes of lusciousness?'

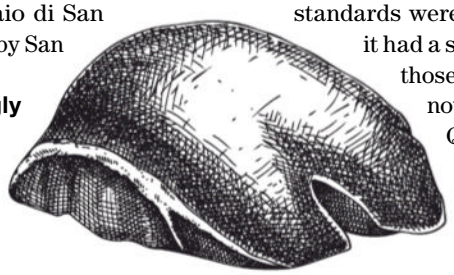
At its best, however, offal offers the ultimate in magnificent, fully immersive eating. As Mr Henderson so rightly points out, we should embrace every part of the beast, not only the prime cuts. Who can resist a pair of plump devilled kidneys at St John, glorious, glistening lobes of lusciousness, sitting atop lustily buttered toast? Or the iconic bone marrow, gently wobbling, scooped out and piled onto still more toast, with a pile of parsley, sharply dressed and studded with capers, and a generous pinch of salt? There's the *fegato burro e salvia* at Riva in Barnes, SW13, elegant slivers of calf's liver, gently fried in butter until a blushing pink, the softest and most sensuous of mouthfuls. Or those milk-fed lambs' kidneys at Barrafina on Adelaide Street, WC2, that arrive atop a metal trivet, above a glowing piece of charcoal, so the fat sizzles when it hits the red hot coal. Bliss. No one does brains better than Henry Harris of Bouchon Racine, EC1. The 'assorted meats in fiery sauce' at Barshu in Soho, W1, has tripe and intestines in a brow-beadingly spicy melange and the lamb offal flatbread at BAM in Highbury Corner (temporarily closed) was a modern take on a Turkish classic.

Forget a Big Mac, hearty faggots of ox heart and pig's liver, strengthened with breadcrumbs and wrapped in caul, will warm the coldest stomach on a freezing winter's day



One of the greatest dishes I ever ate was at Le Grand Véfour, in Paris (back when it was good): veal sweetbreads, creamy and beautifully burnished, studded with black truffle and served in an intense veal jus reduction. Each mouthful was as richly lavish as Marie Antoinette's boudoir, although a lie down after is *de rigueur*. I wasn't always a tripe fan, and still can't eat great slabs of the stuff. I like it cut small, so you don't have too much to chew. The flavour ranges from the bland (when it's been bleached) to the rather beefy. There's the *trippa alla Fiorentina* at I Trippaio di San Frediano, in the *piazza* by San Frediano in Florence, pre-braised rumen (tripe from the cow's first stomach) and omasum, or bible tripe, the most delicate, simmered in a tomato sauce and finished with a flurry of Parmesan. And a trip to Porto is never complete without at least one bowl of *dobrada à modo do Porto*, with white beans, sausage and postage-stamp sized squares of tripe. Casa Nanda is a good place to start.

Sometimes, however, things can get a little too extreme. I remember being in Laos a few years back and eating raw tripe salad. It was like beefy chewing gum and I hardly made it past a mouthful. *Lu*, spiced cold pork blood soup, is probably not best eaten in a truck stop outside Chiang Mai in Thailand. Hygiene standards were not exactly high and it had a sinister ferric tang. But those are exceptions. There's nothing awful about offal. Quite the opposite, in fact—it's one of God's gifts to gastronomy.



Dogs will gaze longingly as you lick St John's famously flavourful marrow bones clean

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Edited by Amie Elizabeth White

Lucky for all

VAN CLEEF & ARPELS has been tapping into the celestial vault for inspiration since the 1950s, but the company's latest Zodiaque collection (*right*) is the first to include bracelets and introduce pendants in white gold. The delicate medals feature a sculptural Western zodiac relief on one side and its associated symbols and dates in Roman numerals on the reverse. Set in yellow gold, the bracelet charms are slightly smaller in size and swing gaily from the wrist. Luck might be a lady, but these are ideal for a fashionable gent, too. From £2,290 (www.vancleefarpels.com).

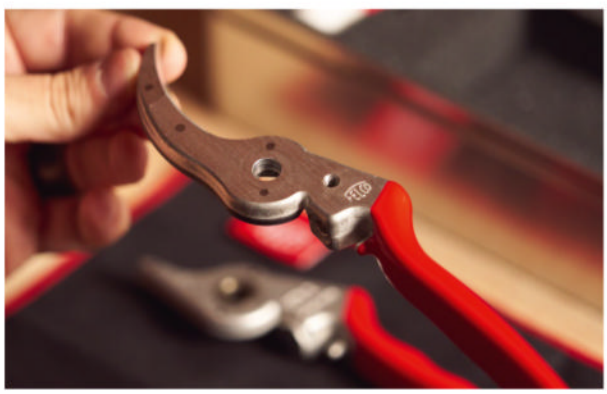
Gut enough to eat

Greengrocer Natoora, which has four stores in London, is livening up functional food with a new limited-edition gut health box, created with Prof Tim Spector, founder of nutrition company ZOE, and head nutritionist Dr Federica Amati. The vibrant selection includes produce at its peak—black iberiko winter tomatoes from Spain, red kiwis from Calabria, Italy, and pink fir potatoes harvested in Cornwall—pantry staples and even a bar of dark chocolate handcrafted in Scotland (full of powerful antioxidants). Everything is chosen for its range of gut-boosting benefits and reminds us that real health begins with diversity, and abundance, at home. £70 (www.natoora.com).

Little luxury

Daylesford Cleaning Collection, from £9

THEY say tidy space, tidy mind, so we can hail the arrival of Daylesford's cleaning collection. Each formula is made with at least 98% natural-origin ingredients and is free from commonly used chemicals and toxins that are harmful to people, pets and the planet. Whereas many natural cleaning products are fragrance-free, these stand out from the crowd with pleasing botanicals, such as chamomile or wild blue basil. The fully recyclable dark-amber bottles maintain the efficiency of the natural ingredients and look great on the utility-room shelf (www.daylesford.com).



Neil Watson

A cut above

I HAVE it on good authority (COUNTRY LIFE's Gardens Editor Tiffany Daneff) that Felco 2 secateurs are the best you can get, so Felco Atelier, a kit comprising all the components and tools to build your own pair, is sure to get green fingers twitching. Immersing you in the 'intricate mechanics' behind the company's legacy tools, the kit comes with printed instructions and a video tutorial to ensure your turn as master toolbuilder results in a pair of professional-grade secateurs/pruning shears you can rely on (and feel smug about). A complete maintenance set, sharpening accessory and microfibre cloth is also included, so you learn how to disassemble, clean and repair your tools should you need to. £130 at selected retailers (https://world.felco.com).

Chamber of secrets

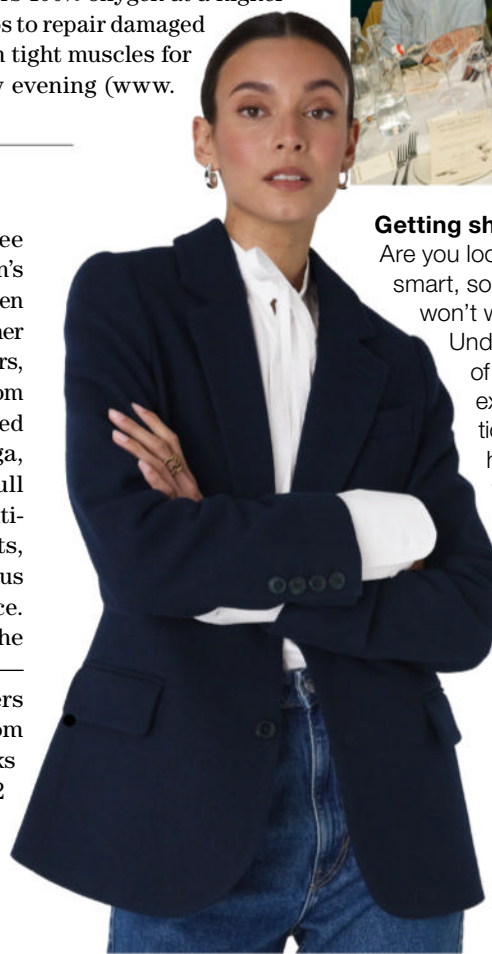
MANY buzzy new health and beauty treatments are invasive or require downtime, so you'll be pleased to know that Le Petit Saint, Mayfair, W1, offers rejuvenation at a cellular level without breaking any skin barriers. Its Saint Rexonage Quantum Lift facial (£600) utilises quantum molecular resonance, a technology that uses pulses of energy to trigger the production of new stem cells. This helps to stimulate collagen production, reduce tell-tale signs of ageing and increase dermal thickness by up to 20%. The procedure starts with a cleanse and massage before a handheld device is worked over the face, feeling wet and warm, but not uncomfortable. Eight sessions are recommended, but I had a noticeably plumper visage and healthy glow after only one. If it's aching muscles, inflammation and sluggishness hampering your health, book a few sessions in a hyperbaric oxygen chamber (£150). The pod-like machine delivers 100% oxygen at a higher pressure so your body absorbs significantly more, which helps to repair damaged tissues and promote cell growth. I had been suffering from tight muscles for days before, but had the best run in a long time that very evening (www.lepetitsaint.com).

Tress to impress

NOURISHMENT, strength and resilience are only three of the benefits promised by revered salon Gielly Green's inaugural haircare range, The One System. Suitable for gentlemen too, it is made up of three core essentials, a shampoo, conditioner and mask, and four targeted leave-in boosters, offering repair and transformation from scalp to split end. Each is powered by a 'sacred trio' of moringa, saffron and rice water, full of microproteins, antioxidants and nutrients, and shares one luxurious woody-floral fragrance. My favourite is the One for Smoothness—a spray that conquers frizz, protects from heat and leaves locks luscious. From £32 (www.giellygreen.co.uk).

Ready, set, Quo!

FORMERLY the home of Karl Marx and a brothel (not at the same time, assures our resident foodie, Emma Hughes), the *grand dame* of Dean Street, W1, Quo Vadis, is celebrating its centenary this year. To mark the occasion, chef Jeremy Lee (*below*) is inviting his favourite chefs for one-night-only residencies. The 'Legends Series' will see Margot and Fergus Henderson return there for the first time in eight years for a 'reunion bigger than Boyzone's' featuring Jackson Boxer (Dove, Brunswick House) and Merlin Labron-Johnson (Osip); and Calum Franklin, 'The Pie King', will challenge Mr Lee to a pie off. For dates and to book, visit www.quovadissoho.co.uk



Getting shirty

Are you looking for a boyfriend that is smart, sophisticated and promises you won't want another? With Nothing Underneath's brilliant new line of boyfriend-cut shirts, part of its extended back-to-work collection, does all of the above. Some have striking exaggerated cuffs, whereas others have bows at the collar, uniting sharp tailoring with a feminine touch. The collection also introduces the company's herringbone wool Hutton blazer in a timelessly chic navy and a variety of leather belts. Town or country, you'll look polished to perfection. From £85 (www.withnothingunderneath.com).

A few of my favourite things

Diana Henry

Born in Northern Ireland, food writer Diana Henry studied English Literature at the University of Oxford and was a BBC television producer for more than a decade, before following her taste buds around the world and starting to write. She has published 11 cookery books–her latest is *Around the Table: 52 Essays on Food & Life*, which gathers more than two decades of her work in one volume–and has weekly columns in *The Telegraph Magazine* and *Waitrose Weekend*. She lives in London with her children and, when not in the kitchen, can be found with her nose in a book.

Edited by Amie Elizabeth White. Illustrations by by Ollie Maxwell

↑ Photographs

I started to think much more about photography when I was working on my first book and how I wanted it to feel. I began to look more closely at everything, tear sheets out of magazines and photocopy lots of pictures, which I use to communicate with my designer and photographer. I learnt a lot about colour and texture and bringing in a bit of the unexpected. If I were to train for another job, I would choose photography. You need to notice, which makes life richer. Among my most precious possessions are the photographs I have of my children, then and now. I can spend hours going through them and would feel bereft if I lost them.

↓ Books

Fiction has remained at the core of my life. I joined the library as soon as I was old enough and spent my childhood immersed in books. I used to roll under the bed in the spare room and hide so people wouldn't make me do anything else with my time. I loved the worlds that books allowed me to visit and, as an adult, love words and sentences. I mostly read American and Irish literature. Two favourites are *A Thousand Acres* by Jane Smiley and *Revolutionary Road* by Richard Yates.

↑ Tableware

I have spent a life gathering up table linen, from Portugal, Italy, France and the Baltics (the latter produce such gorgeous linen), and second-hand cutlery—pistol-handled knives and silver soup ladles. I love the work of Jono Smart, who is based in Scotland. His tableware is matte, plain and has a limited colour range. It is so tactile and I love the way it never fights with food, it provides a canvas for it (www.jonosmart.co.uk).

Chris Terry

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Take a leaf

Add charm to winter months with jewellery inspired by Nature

Styled by Amie Elizabeth White
Photography by Paul Zak

Illustrations by Charles van Sandwyk from *The Wind in the Willows* (2005), *How to See Fairies* (2018), and *Alice in Wonderland* (2019), published by The Folio Society

Facing page, clockwise from top: **Rose Dior pré Catelan necklace in pink gold, diamonds and rose quartz,** £14,200, Dior (www.dior.com); **Piaget rose 'Decor Palace' earrings in 18-carat rose gold set with 144 brilliant-cut diamonds,** £15,900, Piaget (www.piaget.com); **bois de rose bracelet in pink gold and diamonds,** £11,500, Dior (*as before*); **Tudor Rose button cover cufflinks in 18-carat yellow gold,** £9,480, Elizabeth Gage (www.elizabeth-gage.com); **Piaget rose 'Decor Palace' ring in 18-carat gold set with 72 brilliant-cut diamonds,** £8,200, Piaget (*as before*); **Rose Dior pré Catelan ring in pink gold, diamonds and rose quartz,** £11,100, Dior (*as before*)

Clockwise from top: **Mythology dragonfly charm pendant in 18-carat yellow gold, diamond, moonstone, tsavorite and sapphire,** £4,900, Annoushka (www.annoushka.com); **emerald blades of grass brooch,** £1,790, and **citrus poison ivy earrings,** £1,690, both Anabela Chan (www.anabelachan.com); **tsavorite, garnet and diamond deadly nightshade ring,** £22,000, Theo Fennell (www.theofennell.com)

Little luxuries

In any comfortable bathroom, it's the small things that matter, finds **Amelia Thorpe**

↑ **Just a tick**
The Concord wall mirror is inspired by the design of a pocket watch and features a handsome Brass frame. It costs £1,481, from Waterworks (020–7384 4000; www.waterworks.com)

↑ **Pretty and practical**
IP44 rated for bathroom use, Baby Roddy wall lights, in nickel with glass rods, cost £125 each from Pooky and can be used on both sides of a mirror to cast an even light across your face (020–7351 3003; www.pooky.com)

← **Cupboard love**
Taking its design cue from a vintage medicine cabinet, the slender Portobello cabinet offers versatile storage for towels, soaps and bath oils. It costs £1,395, from Neptune (01793 934011; www.neptune.com)

← **Table service**
Designed by Nicola Harding for Drummonds, the Grand Union side table makes an ideal spot to rest a glass of wine and a book beside the bath. It costs £2,382 in antique brass with an arabescato marble top (020–7376 4499; www.drummonds-uk.com)

→ **Softly, softly**
The quilted Unito bath mat is made from deliciously soft plush cotton terry with rounded edges and is finished with cotton piping. It costs £170 from Frette (https://eu.frette.com)

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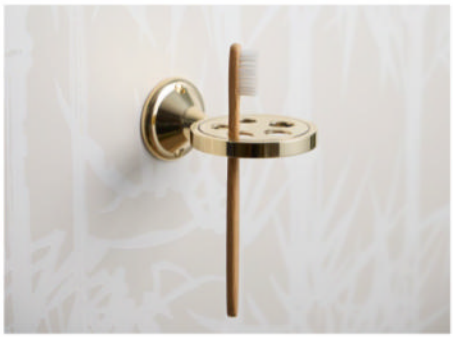
Interiors

↑ **Basket case**
Store essentials in these woven-rattan Bathroom baskets finished with a hand-painted ‘X’ motif. They cost £75 each, from Studio Hám (01491 579371; www.studioham.co.uk)

← **Glass act**
The Claremont vanity mirror was conceived by the interior designer Sophie Paterson. It costs £675 and is handcrafted to order in solid brass at Armac Martin’s factory in Birmingham (0121–359 2111; www.armacmartin.co.uk)

↑ **Tactile quality**
Combining Italian craftsmanship with the latest technology, Sodai Silk Road tiles are made of resilient porcelain—but their delicate woven-thread effect makes them look (and feel) like wallpaper. They cost £594 per sq m, from Lapicida (01423 400100; www.lapicida.com)



← **Traditional touch**
The Empire toothbrush holder, in a polished brass finish, costs £180 from Catchpole & Rye (01233 840840; www.catchpoleandrye.com)

↓ **Sculptural shape**
The solid-bronze Shell design in a Polished Gold is expertly hand-finished by Cristal et Bronze’s artisans in Normandy, France. Designed to dress the vanity unit and to hold rings or soap beside the basin, it costs £2,343 from West One Bathrooms (0333 011 3333; www.westonebathrooms.com)

CATCHPOLE & RYE
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C&R
www.catchpoleandrye.com
Showrooms in London: 0207 3510940 & Kent: 01233 840840
1700mm Polished Copper Bateau with The Aged Copper Bathtub Filler Taps on Standpipes

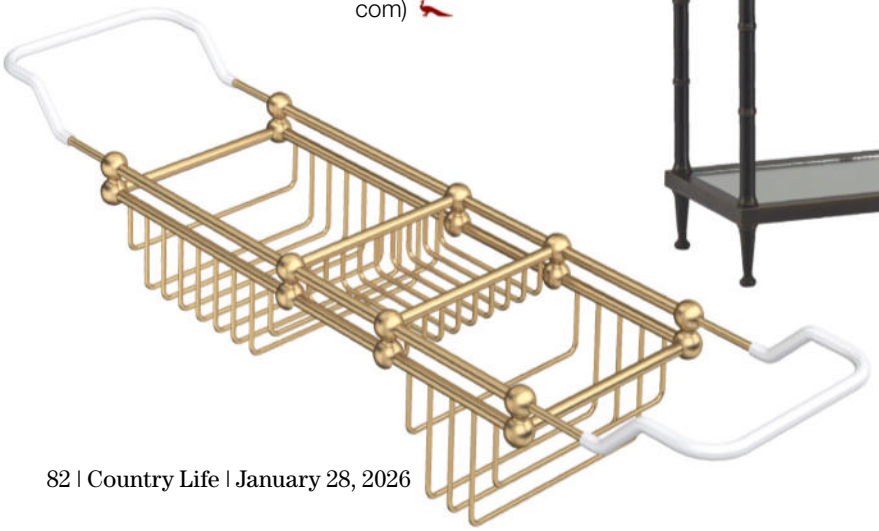
← Decorative detail
The Carmel toothbrush holder features a glossy *faux*-tortoiseshell finish. It costs £232 from Nina Campbell (020–7591 5797; https://shop.ninacampbell.com)

→ Set piece
Handcrafted in Italy from bamboo root and chrome-plated brass, the Lorenzi Milano Bamboo shaving set costs £700, from Abask (0808 178 5628; www.abask.com)

↑ Shelf style
This bracket in aged brass is sure to add a decorative flourish to a simple shelf. A pair costs £549.49, from Balineum (020–7431 9364; www.balineum.co.uk)

↓ On the rack
Available in seven finishes, this bath rack is shown here in Satin Brass and is adjustable to fit a range of bath widths. It costs £645 from Perrin & Rowe (01708 526361; www.houseofrohl.design)

→ Display piece
Collier Webb's Bathroom Whatnot is hand crafted with slender brass uprights, decorative turnings and elegantly tapered feet and costs £9,250 (020–7373 8888; www.collierwebb.com)



Pick of the crop
Bathroom wall lights

Rupert IP44 wall light, £558, and **shade,** from £108, Hector Finch (020–7731 8886; www.hectorfinch.com)

Aston wall light, £900, C. P. Hart (0345 600 1950; www.cphart.co.uk)

Claremont medium wall light with fluted glass, £170.40, Corston (01249 549332; www.corston.com)

Mix it.
Match it.
MAKE IT YOURS
MANDARIN STONE

Arabella Youens

Historic charm: Tintinhull Court stands in the shadow of 'glorious' St Margaret's Church at Tintinhull near Yeovil, Somerset. £1.895m

From lull to lift–Wessex awakens

After a subdued 2025, early smoke signals suggest a more active year lies ahead for the property market in Somerset and Dorset

THE property market in large parts of the West Country last year was, in the words of Ashley Rawlings from the Savills office in Wimborne, Dorset, 'a bit of a damp squib'. Yet, if activity in the first weeks of January foretells what lies ahead this year, the pace of transactions should start to gather speed. 'There is some cautious optimism around,' reports James Toogood, who specialises in the sale of premium properties across the South and South-West for Savills. His team has already agreed sales within Devon and Cornwall for properties not openly advertised, at or in excess of their guide prices. 'Buying agents tell me that their clients are no longer sitting tight, too. It's a sign of good things to come,' he believes.

With this new-found spring in their step, Savills have launched Tintinhull Court, a Grade I-listed house in the village of Tintinhull, near Yeovil in Somerset, for £1.895 million. It has already garnered a 'good

Well-proportioned reception rooms are a feature of 'sensibly laid out' Tintinhull Court

bit of interest' from would-be buyers, says Mr Rawlings, who is handling the sale (01202 856873). Standing beside St Margaret's, which COUNTRY LIFE's former Architectural Editor Marcus Binney once described as 'a glorious medieval church', the charm of the house, which was originally built as a parsonage, can be found in its range of features from different historic periods. There are medieval corner buttresses, Tudor battlements, a nail-studded Elizabethan front door, some 17th-century panelling and, in the dining room, a stone fireplace with a vast 10ft-wide hearth that is perfect for accommodating a spit roast.

> 'Clients are no longer sitting tight. It's a sign of good things to come'

'These sorts of houses tend to split the crowd,' says Mr Rawlings. 'The Grade I listing comes with all its limitations as to what you can do, but the good thing about Tintinhull is that it's already sensibly laid out. I've come across several listed houses in my time where I just can't imagine living there in a straightforward manner. That's not the case with this one.' Central to this thinking is the fact that the 9,000sq ft house already has a large, light-filled family kitchen that leads into the dining room. There are two further reception rooms, including a splendid 'summer' drawing room, which enjoys triple-aspect views. A previous owner who purchased the house in 2001 set about ensuring that almost every bedroom has a bath or shower, as well as recontouring the garden to create a more attractive approach. The interiors have been sympathetically updated by the owner and the house is ready to welcome a new family.

The best of both worlds: Coombe Hill House is set in a secluded position, yet is within walking distance of the high street in Bruton, Somerset. £5.25m for the whole or in lots

Coombe Hill House's elevated spot affords glorious views over surrounding countryside

Outside, a high Ham-stone wall marks the perimeter of the front garden, which has well-stocked beds and borders. To the south of the property are a series of lawns and an all-weather tennis court, as well as a small orchard, a kitchen garden with a greenhouse and an oak-frame garage. There are two acres of grounds, although further land might be available to purchase. For those needing access to the capital, the mainline station at Castle Cary is only a few miles away.

In east Somerset, the relative proximity of the now long-established private members' club Babington House acts as an added attraction, particularly to those moving to the countryside for the first time. It also appeals to buyers coming back to the UK from a period spent working overseas, where they might have experienced membership benefits, such as a ready-made social life in a spectacular setting. According to Mr Rawlings, one potential buyer who has expressed interest in Tintinhull said that being within a certain distance of the club is high on their list of priorities.

During the frantic race to the countryside set off by the covid pandemic, the east Somerset town of Bruton recorded the biggest increase in property sales of any country location in the UK, according to the portal Rightmove. Many were attracted by the presence of a Hauser & Wirth art gallery, Michelin-starred →

Eight-bedroom Higher Waterston Farm is surrounded by eight acres of gardens and grounds in Dorset's beautiful Piddle Valley, about four miles from Dorchester. £3.75m

restaurants and a direct (albeit long, at more than two hours) train journey to London Paddington. It is a counterfactual exercise, but there's a strong possibility that had Coombe Hill House been launched on the market in the summer of 2021 rather than that of 2025, it would have sold almost instantly. Instead, the distinguished Grade II*-listed late-Georgian house within a short walk of Bruton's high street is still looking for a buyer.

Located off Coombe Hill and commanding elevated views over the town, the five-bedroom house has an outdoor swimming pool, a tennis court and stables. It's been a much-loved home for three decades, but the London-based vendor is now selling with a heavy heart, says Mr Toogood. 'Coombe Hill is a lovely house in a popular spot that is very private, but it benefits from having everything that Bruton offers on the doorstep.' Although the house has been looked after with care, he acknowledges that a new owner will want to put their own decorative stamp on the property.

Coombe Hill is now available in lots, with the main house and 10 acres priced at £4.5m or as a whole at £5.25m, which includes Coombe Lodge, a two-bedroom detached cottage located on the other side of the lane with a further 16 acres of agricultural land (020–7016 3780). 'I'm cautiously optimistic that things are already looking livelier this year,' says Mr Toogood. 'Pricing correctly is vital. Perhaps with the exception of some who bought at the height of the market and are looking to claw back their investment, vendors have adjusted their expectations.'

The team at Blue Book is equally hopeful that they will find a new owner for Higher Waterston Farm, a beautiful Georgian house with a swimming pool and tennis court set in unspoilt countryside in Dorset's Piddle Valley. It was launched onto the market last summer, but, to date, has yet to find a buyer. 'There's a sense that things have changed. We've just organised a third viewing this month for a prospective buyer, something that I don't think happened in the last half of 2025—perhaps the South-West is now waking up,' says selling agent Lindsay Cuthill (07967 555545).

He echoes the experience of others—that last year was a struggle. 'The West Country is always quick to respond to downturns and slow to recover. That's particularly true in this increasingly polarised country market where there is the Cotswolds, which gets all the focus, and then everywhere else.'

> 'Higher Waterston is a beautiful Georgian house set in unspoilt countryside'

The small rural hamlet of Higher Waterston sits within the rolling Dorset Downs, two miles from the village of Puddletown, which has a village shop, post office, surgery and pub. Dating predominantly from the 1790s and extended in the 1920s, the eight-bedroom house, which is unlisted, has been a happy family home for the past 30 years. During that time, the owners have undertaken an extensive renovation and a full replumb, presenting it to the market in move-in condition. In addition, arranged around a traditional brick-and-flint courtyard set apart from the main house, are five income-generating units, all let on assured shorthold tenancies—meaning that the property qualifies for the mixed-use lower rate of stamp duty. 'They are very separate and provide a good income that would cover the running costs of the main house,' says Mr Cuthill. Higher Waterston Farm is on the market for £3.75m.

The dual-aspect, south- and west-facing drawing room—one of a host of comfortable reception rooms at Higher Waterston Farm—has French windows leading onto a terrace

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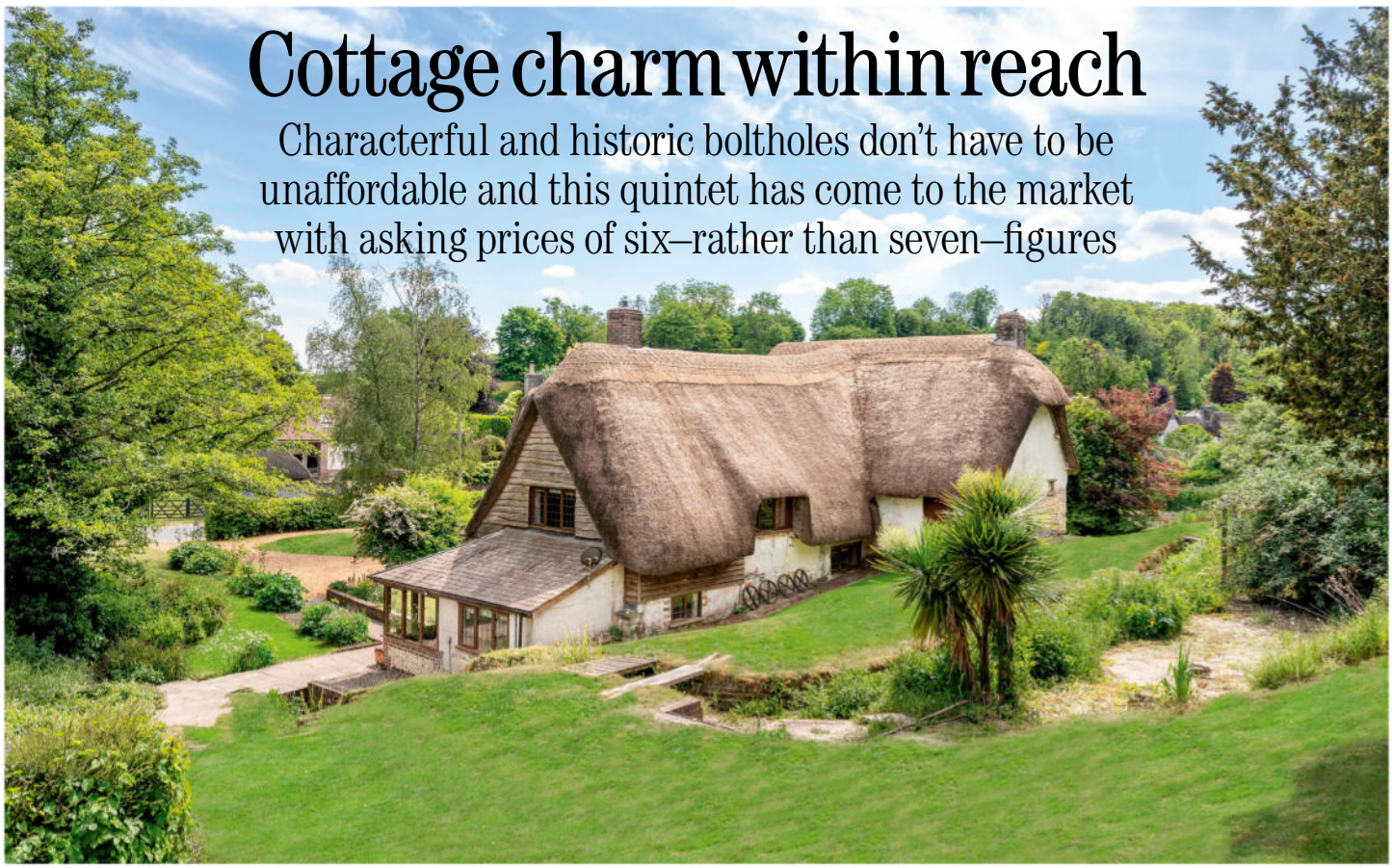
Julie Harding

Cottage charm within reach

Characterful and historic boltholes don't have to be unaffordable and this quintet has come to the market with asking prices of six–rather than seven–figures



↑ Dorset, £835,000

The village of Winterborne Stickland is sited in a chalkland valley on the edge of the Blackmore Vale, sandwiched between Blandford Forum and Milton Abbas, where the views are invariably glorious and far-reaching. It is a fitting setting for the equally pretty Grade II-listed thatched Mill House, which itself is set in more than three-quarters of an acre, some of it sweeping lawns. Buying Mill House will be like purchasing a slice of history, because there was a mill listed at Stickland in the Domesday survey, probably on the same site as this 2,300sq ft period house. A little more recently, in the 1500s, the core of this cottage was built and the agent comments: 'As you might imagine with a house that is more than 400 years old, there have been alterations and additions and you can read the history by looking at the mix of stone, tile and timber floors, huge beams, oak panelling and wonderful fireplaces.' Mill House has four bedrooms and three reception rooms, all extensively restored in the 1990s, with some maintenance continued by the current owners, who are moving on after 15 years. They are surely sad to go. *Jackson-Stops (01258 423002)*

↑ Worcestershire, £795,000

Hill House sits on the edge of the Cotswolds National Landscape, at the foot of Bredon Hill in the village of Kemerton, which was once home to bestselling author John Moore, who wrote of the local area in his 'Brensham Trilogy'. Hill House, built in the Regency, boasts 1,972ft sq of space, the sitting room on the ground floor particularly spacious at 25½ft by 15½ft, and there is a dining room that leads into the kitchen, plus a study. Upstairs are three double bedrooms, a single bedroom and two bath/shower rooms. Hill House isn't listed, but is within a conservation area. *Knight Frank (01242 246951)*

If only I'd bought…

November 18, 1971

COTSWOLDS

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cloakroom, 3 bedrooms,
bathroom, studio or
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→ **Norfolk, £800,000**

'This distinguished, Grade II-listed, 15th-century detached property offers a rare opportunity to own a truly remarkable piece of history, perfectly balanced with modern comfort and versatility,' says the agent of Martyrs Cottage in East Bilney. In terms of 'remarkable history', it is thought that priest and early convert to Protestantism Thomas Bilney was probably born in Martyrs Cottage in about 1495. Therefore, the new buyers may find themselves purchasing a fascinating time capsule, where history is visible at every turn, from the ancient handmade oak doors, flagstone flooring and quirky wooden beams to the inglenook fireplaces. The four bedrooms are arranged over two floors, whereas on the ground floor, as well as the kitchen, dining hall and sitting room, there is a boot room, laundry and shower room. A two-bedroom, two-bathroom cottage complements the main house—and all this, plus a wrap-around garden, is on the market for considerably less than £1 million. *Sowerbys (01362 693591)*

← **West Sussex, £825,000**

Good things come in threes and this is certainly the case with Willowhale Cottage, which has three bedrooms and three reception rooms. This Grade II-listed house is located on Nyetimber Lane in Bognor Regis, a town converted into a resort in the 18th century by Sir Richard Hotham, with some literary buffs believing that Jane Austen used this place as the model for Sanditon in her final novel. By the time Sir Richard was trying (but failing) to get people to adopt the name of Hothamton for his new creation, Willowhale Cottage was already three centuries old—it is thought to have been built when Edward IV was on the throne—and with, no doubt, an equally interesting past. It has certainly carried its historical features through time, from its exposed wooden beams and leaded-light windows to its reed-thatched roof (although the latter has obviously been renewed more recently). Outside there are mature gardens of just over half an acre that wrap around the cottage and contain a two-bed annexe that could be put to a variety of uses, from housing elderly relatives to a rental prospect. *Hamptons (01243 884307)*

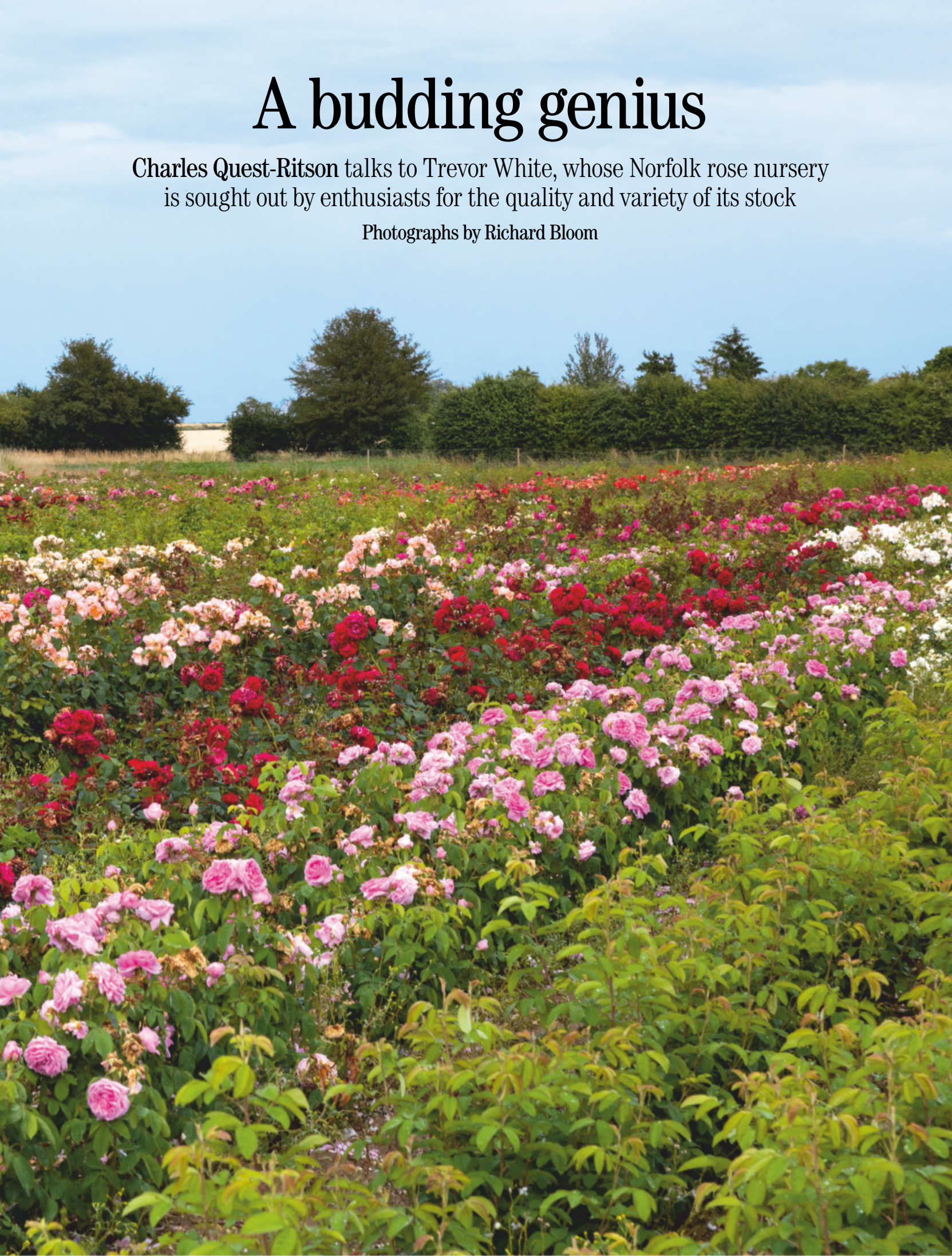
→ **Oxfordshire, £665,000**

The Grade II-listed Vine Cottage, situated in the conservation area of Stanford in the Vale and originally two cottages, has wisteria-clad walls and true picture-postcard looks. It is believed to date to the late 16th century, but was remodelled two centuries later and then updated much more recently. As agent Nicky Quentel comments on this property, which is attached at one end: 'A real gem! Cosy, yet bright. With character, yet comfortable.' Characterful it certainly is, boasting a mass of exposed beams throughout the sitting room, dining room and kitchen/breakfast room, as well as wooden floors. The three bedrooms on the first floor have beams, too, and beguiling slanted ceilings. Outside, there is a terrace and enclosed garden. Although many villages have little in the way of facilities, the same can't be said of Stanford in the Vale, which has the likes of a mini-supermarket, newsagent, Post Office and even a gym. Oxford and Swindon are relatively short 30- and 26-minute drives away respectively. *Savills (01865 339700)*

A budding genius

Charles Quest-Ritson talks to Trevor White, whose Norfolk rose nursery is sought out by enthusiasts for the quality and variety of its stock

Photographs by Richard Bloom



IT is always a pleasure to hear a success story in horticulture. Forty years ago, Trevor White gave up a promising career as a microbiologist to start up a nursery and pursue his love for old roses. His Norfolk-based business, producing and selling thousands of old roses every year, has delighted keen rose growers and brought him a fine sense of achievement, a modest degree of prosperity and great happiness.

Mr White, now in his sixties, was brought up at Egham in Surrey where, throughout the past century, dozens of nurseries flourished on the local soil, Bagshot sand. A holiday job when he was a teenager took him to the great wholesale nursery of T. Hilling & Co in Chobham, where Graham Stuart-Thomas had been the general manager from 1939–55. When he matriculated at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, however, Mr White started to do part-time and seasonal work for Peter Beales. Beales was for many years Britain's leading specialist in old roses—gallicas, damasks, moss roses and the like—and his nursery at Attleborough in Norfolk is still well-known to rose-lovers today.

> 'Trevor White's devotion to old roses has never wavered'

After he graduated, Mr White intended to work in veterinary research, but Beales offered him a full-time job among roses, which changed the direction of his working life forever. 'If I was in love with the rose before,' he says, 'I was now utterly bewitched.' Beales was a good manager of people, but perhaps not so successful in managing a commercial undertaking. After a couple of years, during which Beales took him to help on his stand at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, Mr White decided to set up his own business, propagating roses for sale. It was not an easy venture—he had no capital, so, to make ends meet, he took on part-time jobs, such as budding roses for some of the large nurseries around Wisbech in Cambridgeshire. For his first crop of 10,000 roses, he had to plant all the rootstocks himself and use his spade to dig up the finished roses when they were ready for sale 18 months later. The following year, he budded 16,000 roses and, in the third year, 22,000. Nowadays, all the roses are undercut mechanically before being lifted.

Selling his roses turned out to be fairly easy. Mr White was correct in his belief that demand would be strong and decided from the start that he would operate only as a wholesaler. Not only was he able to sell some of his roses back to Beales, but he soon found that garden centres were interested in what he could offer—as were several grand gardens, famous for their roses, that were open to the public and wanted roses to sell to their visitors. Cranborne Manor in Dorset, Heale House in Wiltshire and the great rose garden at the National Trust's Mottisfont Abbey in Hampshire were among his first customers. His plants were well grown, healthy and competitively priced—people who remember his roses from those early days say he has been a consistent supplier of high-quality stock.

Starting up a business is hard work and roses are horribly prickly from start to finish. The nurseryman's year begins with buying and planting rootstocks; Mr White uses the 'Laxa' variety—popular because it throws up fewer of those suckers that baffle and irritate gardeners. Budding them is a tedious, difficult and exhausting operation, usually carried out in the sun and heat of July. A single dormant bud is taken from the parent plant, inserted into a T-shaped cut at the base of the rootstock and then sealed so that the stock accepts it. Mr White reckons he can bud about 2,000 roses a day and hope for a good 'take', typically more than 95%. In winter, all the top growth is cut back to a point just above the sealed bud, so that, in spring, the stock will put all its energy into making that bud grow. More shocks await the plant, because it will be pruned very hard, almost to ground level, at the end of May, to encourage the new growth to bush out, make a shapely plant →

Preceding pages: **Trevor White grows almost 600 rose varieties.** *Above:* **The disease-resistant climber *Rosa* 'Peach Melba', Rose of the Year 2023.** *Facing page:* **Mr White's blooms offer old roses' scent and shape with the repeat-flowering habit of modern ones**

Trevor White's top five roses

Rosa gallica* var. *officinalis The ancient, once-flowering Red Rose of Lancaster, with large, sweet-scented semi-double flowers that open wide on a sturdy, healthy bush. A classic

***Rosa* 'Blush Noisette'** An early French hybrid (originally known as 'Noisette Carnée'), healthy, scented and almost always in flower. Large clusters of slender crimson buds open palest pink. Hardy, healthy and nearly thornless

***Rosa* 'Bengal Crimson'** This popular China rose makes a handsome shrub with only a few prickles. It is covered in large, musk-scented, single, pale-crimson flowers with elegant, scrolled-back petals from May to November. In warm climates, or a conservatory, it is never out of flower

***Rosa* 'de Rescht'** A very beautiful Portland Damask rose, with strongly sweet-scented, medium-sized flowers, very full of pale-crimson petals and sometimes a button eye. Neat, compact and a good repeater

***Rosa woodsii* var. Fendleri** A wild rose from America, native from Alaska to northern Mexico. The rich-pink flowers, with paler petal-edges, are strongly scented (and large for a species), borne on a healthy bush and followed by red hips that give colour right through to spring because the birds ignore them

Facing page: ***Rosa* 'Bonica' is recommended by Mr White for its continuous flowering.**
Above: **The almost thornless, repeat-flowering 'Blush Noisette', bred in France in 1817**

and flower for the first time towards the end of July. It can then be lifted for sale in autumn.

'Forty years on and, remarkably, we're still here,' says Mr White, not rich, but comfortable. He and his wife, Vanessa, have raised four children, all of whom helped in the nursery. Family holidays were difficult, because a nurseryman's work is never done. Today, when their children reflect upon their upbringing, they much admire their parents' work ethic.

Some years ago, their son Henry, now in his mid-thirties, announced that he would like to continue to develop the business. He left a career in television management, trained at RHS Wisley in Surrey, worked at Fulham Palace Garden Centre—London's best—and came home to Norfolk full of energy, talent and new ideas. Then came covid. Sales plummeted. Garden centres were empty of buyers, but full of unsold stock. Mr White Jnr saw that the only way forward was to move quickly from wholesale sales to retail and to sell their roses online. The decision has transformed the business; online sales now account for 95% of the company's turnover.

Mr White Snr's devotion to old roses has never wavered, but he quickly recognised the excellence of David Austin's roses, which evolved from crossing old roses with modern varieties to combine the best features of both—the shape and scent of old roses with the repeat-flowering habit of modern ones. He also admired roses in the Austin style that

> 'He has built up a fine list of strongly scented "early English" roses'

were developed by foreign nurserymen, notably the Renaissance line from Poulsen in Denmark, the Nostalgic roses of Tantau in Germany and others from Delbard in France. He therefore bought budwood from all these Continental pioneers to propagate their varieties and add them to his own list. He can no longer bud 'English' roses because David Austin has taken propagation in-house, but he believes that many Austin roses that are now out of patent are nevertheless very good garden plants. Therefore, he has built up a fine list of strongly scented 'early English' roses, such as super-vigorous 'Leander', dark-red 'Othello' and compact 'Pretty Jessica', which are no longer offered by Austin. He has also begun to breed a few roses of his own, growing them from seed and selecting the best for introduction. Characteristically modest about his achievements, he is proud of a compact, lemon-yellow Hybrid Tea, peach-scented and very healthy, that he introduced in 2018 and named 'Esme' for one of his daughters.

Mr White sells nearly 600 different varieties, four-fifths of them as bare-root plants, ready for planting in winter and early spring. The stocks that remain at the end of the planting season are potted up and sold in their pots for the rest of the year. Thus, with young Henry in charge, Mr White can start to relax and start work upon one more project—making the rose garden that he promised his wife more than 40 years ago, but which, just for the moment, remains unmade.

Visit www.trevorwhiteroses.co.uk

Tim Richardson

Having a wild time

BACK in 1994, I made a big mistake when I decided not to attend a conference titled Perennial Perspectives at Kew. As a mid-20-something (working at this magazine), I decided my Saturday was better spent elsewhere, not with a group of people whom I deemed to be 'plant nerds'. This conference, of course, turned out to be a landmark moment in the naturalistic planting movement (also known as 'New Perennials'), which went on to have a huge influence on global gardening in the 21st century. As a garden writer trying to keep my finger on the pulse, it would have been better had I gone.

Going wild: shire horses at work in the wildflower meadow at Kensington Palace, London

Thirty years on, I wasn't going to make the same error twice, so I made sure I had a ticket to the Wilding Gardens conference, held at Manchester University earlier this month. I am sure this event will also, in time, prove to be a key moment, because with a full house of 550 delegates and more than 30 speakers across two full days, it was a real 'gathering of the clans' for those involved in the rewilding movement, with specific application to the smaller, garden scale.

Leading the way as co-organisers—alongside luminaries such as designers Tom Stuart Smith, Urquhart & Hunt (winners of Chelsea 2022 with their 'beaver garden') and ecological planter James Hitchmough—were Isabella Tree and Charlie Burrell of the Knepp estate in West Sussex, flagship project of the rewilding cult.

Did I say cult? Perhaps that's a little unfair, because there was nothing to suggest in Ms Tree's initial presentation that 'Knepp expects' everyone to follow suit, especially given its large scale. It's simply that the group-think enthusiasm and ideological certainty of the movement inevitably prompts questions.

One of the aims of the conference was to provide an opportunity for the ecological-activists-formerly-known-as-gardeners to hear what each other had to say, but although there was a strong sense of shared purpose among the speakers and attendees (who were mainly horticulturists as opposed to designers), there was less evidence of a shared methodology. If anything, each speaker seemed to be locked in their own silo, whether that be habitat restoration, care for insects and pollinators, avant-garde agricultural practice or community gardening using wildflowers. I had expected there to be a little more emphasis on aesthetics—but for this group, it transpired, the visual is almost an irrelevance next to the creation of a specific feeling or habitat-atmosphere. As an approach, it is reminiscent of the 20th century *heempark* movement (creating public parks planted with native species) of J. P. Thijsse in the Netherlands.

> ‘“How do we make scrub sexy?” asked Lulu Urquhart’

One of the richest presentations came from regenerative farmer Joshua Sparkes, who started off uncertainly, but accelerated into a thrilling joyride of apparently counter-intuitive agri- and horti- practice, involving concepts such as 'Japanese micro-forest' and the deliberate cultivation of different vegetable crops mingled with weeds at a ratio of 5:20 ('competition is a myth, I have found,' he sternly stated). Such ideas are good to hear about, if harder to accept as practicable. Other highlights included Lulu Urquhart's evocative description of 'the cacophony and the chaos, all the dead wood and gnarly places' of the wild habitats that she finds inspiring and wants to replicate in gardens. 'How do we make scrub sexy?' she asked.

The concept of messiness was picked up by Charlie Harpur, who addressed the question of rewilding at garden scale, a question his employers at Knepp had earlier confessed to having avoided for years. Mr Harpur described the habitat value of structures such as sheds in gardens, the importance of dead wood and decaying matter to wildlife and the desirability of a range of different heights in planting—including grassland and meadow, where mown or trodden paths are a help to the natural world, not an imposition. His suggestion for smaller spaces was to focus on one species, such as the glow-worms one speaker said he was nurturing in his back garden. Mr Harpur concluded by emphasising the importance of connectivity between gardens, creating 'wildlife corridors' along which animals, birds and insects can progress, pausing as and when they need.

Fergus Garrett appeared at the end of the conference with something of a floral bombshell, making a powerful case for Great Dixter in East Sussex as an ecologically rich environment that attracts even more insect diversity than most 'wilder'-looking sites. He has the data to prove it, too, having invited squads of ecologists in recent years.

The organisers say they intend to repeat this event in two years' time. Given the existence of 'rewilding fatigue' already in some quarters, some might say this sounds ambitious. I think not, however—this is a sincere wellspring of activity and the conference was a rip-roaring success by any measure.

Tim Richardson is a garden writer and historian

Horticultural aide-mémoire

Plan the vegetable garden

Every kitchen gardener knows roughly the plan of the vegetable layout for this year based on past experience, but a few telling notes in the pocketbook help to clear the mists. The principle of rotation has stood the test of time: it maintains soil fertility and minimises the risk of disease. Grow root vegetables on unmanured soil or look forward to unfeasibly forked crops. Keep brassicas together in a block and net them against butterflies. Onions and their relations should be in a well-manured unit. Peas and the various beans make their own nitrogen. **SCD**

Next week Leeks

Getty; Alamy

Kitchen garden cook Kale

by Melanie Johnson

Curly kale and potato terrine with buttery lemon sauce, pickled walnuts and roasted hazelnuts

Ingredients
Serves 4
For the terrine
150g curly kale, tough stems removed
600g waxy potatoes, peeled
50g butter, melted, plus extra for greasing
2tbspn olive oil
A few thyme leaves
For the buttery lemon sauce
100g unsalted butter
2 egg yolks
1tspn lemon juice
1tspn warm water
Pinch of salt
To serve
8 pickled walnuts, finely chopped (alternatively, 4tbspn capers mixed with 3tspn balsamic vinegar)
30g roasted, chopped hazelnuts
A shaved fennel and apple salad, lightly dressed

Method

1 Preheat the oven to 160˚C fan/180˚C/350˚F/gas mark 4 and butter and line a small loaf tin—roughly 18cm by 8cm (7in by 3in)—with baking parchment.

2 Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil, add the prepared kale and blanch for 3–4 minutes until softened and deep green. Drain and refresh in iced water, then squeeze dry in a clean tea towel. Remove any thick ribs and tear the leaves into pieces.

3 Slice the potatoes thinly with a mandolin and toss with the melted butter, olive oil, thyme leaves, salt and pepper. Layer the terrine with shingled layers of potato and kale, finishing with potatoes on top. Cover with baking paper and foil, place the tin in a roasting tray and pour boiling water around it to come halfway up the sides. Bake for about 1 hour and 15 minutes or until a knife slides through easily. Remove from the oven, pour off any excess liquid and then press the terrine with a weighted tin (another tin with a can in it works well) while still warm. Chill for at least four hours or ideally overnight.

4 Cut the chilled terrine into slices and then reheat on a baking tray in a hot oven for 10–12 minutes until it is golden and crisp at the edges.

5 Melt the butter for the sauce in a small pan until nutty and golden. In a heatproof bowl over barely simmering water, whisk the yolks, lemon juice, water and salt until thick and pale, then slowly drizzle in the warm brown butter, whisking constantly, until smooth and glossy. Keep warm until you serve.

6 Spoon the buttery lemon sauce onto each plate, top with a slice of hot terrine then scatter with the chopped pickled walnuts and roasted hazelnuts. Add the shaved salad and you have a magical starter.

Another idea with kale

Tuscan kale and cannellini beans

Heat a splash of olive oil in a frying pan and add two grated cloves of garlic. Cook gently for a minute and then add 200g of roughly chopped curly kale (tough ribs removed) and a splash of vegetable or chicken stock. Cover and let it braise for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the kale is tender. Stir in a drained tin of cannellini beans, a little more olive oil and a pinch of salt and pepper, then cook uncovered for a few minutes until the beans are heated through and the liquid has reduced. Finish with a squeeze of lemon juice, a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil and a few chilli flakes. Serve alongside grilled Dover sole or cod with a sauce vièrge made with diced tomato, chopped parsley, lemon juice and olive oil spooned over the fish.

Melanie Johnson

Carla Passino

Left: **Battle dress: a striking suit of armour.** *Right:* **The jacket of a female firefighter—one of the non-military roles the samurai adopted**

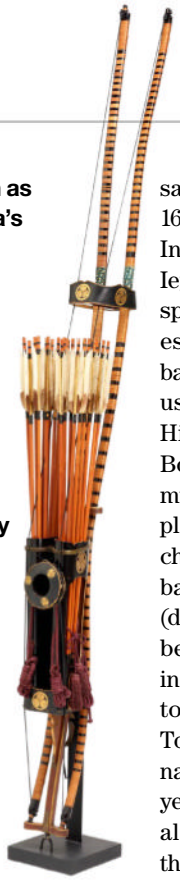
The way of the warrior

Samurai rose to be global emblems of honour and courage, but their story doesn't always match the myths they told about themselves, as a British Museum exhibition shows

ANTOKU was a toddler when he became Emperor of Japan. It was the spring of 1180 and his elevation to the imperial throne, engineered by his grandfather Kiyomori, head of the Taira clan, looked set to be the ultimate humiliation for the rival Minamoto family. Five years later, the child emperor, not yet seven, was dead at the hand of his own grandmother, who had jumped into the sea with him and drowned them both rather than surrendering to their enemies. The Genpei War that unfolded during Antoku's short reign, pitting Taira against Minamoto, as well as factions of the Minamoto against one another, put an end not only to his life, but also to imperial power, sanctioning instead the ascendance of feudal warlords and the rise of a new warrior class: the samurai.

Except, however, they went by a different name. The word samurai, albeit derived from the Japanese verb *saburau*, to serve, is something of a Western construct, used by Europeans in the Middle Ages and again from the 19th century. In Japan, the warriors were traditionally known as *musha* and, later, *bushi*. Much like their name, their role was not exactly what decades of books and films have led us to believe, as 'Samurai', a new British Museum exhibition, demonstrates. The first samurai, explains the show's curator, Rosina Buckland, were blades (and bows) for hire, often younger sons who found ready employment in clan power struggles—until the Genpei War helped them wrest power from the imperial court and opened the door to the development of a class identity. The Minamoto established a shogunate in the city of Kamakura, creating a system of vassalage in which warriors and their families had a clear social position: they traded their military skills for land and remuneration. 'Felling a high-status enemy would get you a higher reward,' explains Dr Buckland, so warriors would take the heads of their foes to ensure just recompense. Loyalty was a relative notion, with records showing samurai would often change sides if chance of reward was higher elsewhere—and for all that honour and shame were long central to their self-perception, they 'engaged in deceit and subterfuge with striking aplomb', according to Japanologist Karl Friday. An example of their 'flexible' approach to combat ethics comes from the Genpei War. Yoritomo, the man who would later become the first Kamakura shogun, ostensibly sent an envoy to call a rival warlord to parley—but when the latter arrived at the agreed meeting place, the envoy took him by surprise and killed him.

Yoritomo also had few qualms in getting rid of his own half-brother Yoshitsune, a military genius who was instrumental in securing the Minamoto clan's victory. Far from showing gratitude, the Kamakura shogun, perhaps afraid of being outshone, turned against his sibling and forced him to seek refuge with a warlord in the north of the country. When the latter died and his heir, under pressure from the shogun, withdrew his support, Yoshitsune had to no choice but kill his own family and commit ritual suicide. His death, however, turned him into a hero of legend, celebrated in screen paintings, plays and songs (much later, in the 19th century, a story even circulated that he had escaped his fate, fled to the Asian mainland and become none other than Genghis Khan; he remains the country's most famous warrior to this day).



Left: **Films such as Kurosawa Akira's *Seven Samurai* (1954) sparked a reappraisal of Japan's traditional warriors.** *Right:* **Archery remained popular in the 19th century**

Despite—or perhaps because of—the almost continual fighting, medieval Japanese society was tremendously conscious of the importance of culture, both in itself and as a potent political tool, with particular emphasis placed on it during the 14th-century Ashikaga shogunate. In 1333, Emperor Go-Daigo managed to get rid of the pesky Kamakura rulers and began to claw back power. His restoration, however, was short lived. One of his original backers, Ashikaga Takauji, grew disaffected, obliterated the imperial supporters at the Battle of Minatogawa and set himself up as shogun, even establishing a rival emperor in the North. With two imperial courts, the samurai consolidated their position at the top of Japanese society and went on to assert their pre-eminence by pursuing the Chinese principle of *bunbu ryōdō*, accomplishments in both the literary and the military arts: '*Nō* [theatre] performances or formal tea preparation were arenas in which power could be expressed,' says Dr Buckland. Connoisseurship even extended to 'humble' utensils: 'Giving a famous tea bowl would have been like giving a Fabergé egg as a present.'

Painting, song, theatre and poetry were also the means through which the warriors built their own myth, an effort that had started in the 13th century, when stories of their battle exploits were disseminated by itinerant lute players. However, just when those samurai tales began being printed from about 1600, their role in society changed dramatically. In the early 17th century, warlord Tokugawa Ieyasu triumphed in the latest civil war to split the country, made himself shogun and established a power system, *bakufu*, that balanced central control with local autonomy, ushering in 250 years of stable government. His success had been anything but a given. Born Matsudaira Takechiyo, he had spent much of his childhood as a hostage in power plays, although by 1567, the year in which he changed his name, he had solidified his power base as the vassal of an important *daimyo* (domain lord). In the following decades, he became an increasingly influential player in the conflict among clans until matters came to a head in 1598, when his latest overlord, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, almost on his deathbed, named him as one of five regents for his five-year-old heir. In events spectacularly fictionalised by James Clavell's 1975 novel *Shogun*, the regency council soon split into two factions, which clashed at the Battle of Sekigahara on October 21, 1600. The wily Tokugawa, who headed one of the camps, promised land and riches to many of the commanders supposedly fighting for his opponent. They switched sides and won him the day, although the war staggered on into the next decade, only ending in 1615 after the fall of Osaka Castle, the Toyotomi stronghold.

The long peace that followed under successive Tokugawa shoguns meant that the →

Take five: forthcoming Japanese exhibitions

This year is not only about samurai. A cornucopia of exhibitions and displays featuring fine and decorative arts from Japan is opening in Britain in the next couple of months.

1 'Aki Sasamoto: Grilled Diagrams' The New York-based Japanese artist will create a griddle-like installation that she will bring to life with performance art. Studio Voltaire, London SW4 (February 4–April 19; www.studiovoltaire.org)

2 'Chiharu Shiota: Threads of Life' Berlin-based Ms Shiota will take over the top floor of the Hayward Gallery, London SE1, with immersive floor-to-ceiling works, akin to *Collecting Feelings*, 2024 (*above*) (February 17–May 3; www.southbankcentre.co.uk)

3 'Making Waves: The Art of Japanese Woodblock Print' More than 100 works by masters such as Hokusai and Hiroshige, including the latter's *Asakusa Rice fields and Torinomachi Festival* (*right*), will fill York Art Gallery (February 27–August 30; www.yorkartgallery.org.uk)

4 'Beneath the Great Wave: Hokusai, Hiroshige, and ukiyo-e print' Another option to see pictures from the Floating World, this time at the Whitworth Gallery in Manchester (March 14–November 15; www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk)

5 'Urushi Now: Contemporary Japanese Lacquer' A V&A Museum display will put the spotlight on the latest developments of this ancient artform (from April 29; www.vam.ac.uk)

samurai, no longer warriors, had to find themselves something else to do. Historically, they had fulfilled bureaucratic, as well as military, functions and it is to those that they turned to from the 17th century, their ranks supplying record keepers and tax collectors, guards and policemen, firefighters and diplomats. However, they remained very conscious that their status derived from their history as warriors, so they kept swords and armour they never used, cultivated training they would never employ on a battlefield—and continued to embrace the Arts. Among Dr Buckland's favourite pieces is a picture of a cat sleeping under a peony bush, the flower's lush petals suggesting abundance, which was made by a woman of the samurai class, the wife of a *daimyo*, at the end of the 18th century—ladies being expected to be as accomplished as men. Admiring 'the stylistic contrast between thick, opaque pigments for the flowers and the lovely, calligraphic inkwork for the rock', Dr Buckland became determined to discover who she was: 'So many of these women are only described by association with the men around them, but I found her name. She's called Sada-hime, the younger sister of the senior counsellor in the 1780s, Matsudaira Sadanobu.'

It's also during those 250 years of Tokugawa peace that the Japanese publishing industry thrived, developing the woodblock prints that would later inspire the Impressionists. Originally rooted in the Floating World of courtesans and *kabuki* theatre that entertained the samurai men of Edo (modern-day Tokyo), many woodblock-printed books shared the legends of the warriors with a wider public, cementing their heroic image. Just as Japanese prints reached their apogee in the mid 19th century, however, the country became once again very unstable, with internal strife exacerbated by outside intervention. 'Russia and the US, in particular, had been circling Japan with their ships, pressuring them to open up to trade.' A part of Japanese society wanted the foreigners gone and coalesced around the figure of the emperor against the Tokugawa shogunate. Tensions soon escalated into battle and, in 1868, the shogun's forces were repelled. Imperial dominance was formally restored and, in the sweeping reforms that followed, the samurai lost status, stipends and, often, their seats, as castles throughout the country were torn down.

> 'The "global samurai" is incredibly useful to drive tourism'

Yet, Japan's rejection of its warrior class didn't last long: in the 1890s, as the country became involved in wars abroad, a desire grew for a distinctively Japanese martial identity. Drawing in part on European chivalry ideals, Japan reinterpreted the history of samurai and confected for them a code of behaviour, the *bushidō*. This became a propaganda tool: conveying the idea that the samurai spirit had entered all people so they could all be soldiers for the nation, it underpinned the colonial expansion that culminated in the Second World War. It was inevitable, then, that, after the country surrendered to the Allies, this militarist taint would once again lead to the repudiation of samurai tradition—until, in the 1950s, Japan's celebrated film director Kurosawa Akira revisited it in a nuanced, sensitive way. 'He wasn't having them as chest-beating, idealised warriors. They were conflicted and had complicated emotions.' It's from this moment that the samurai explode in popularity and are quickly appropriated by popular culture worldwide. Their tales, their costumes, their weapons inspire films, television programmes, contemporary art and fashion—in the 'Star Wars' films, both Darth Vader's and, much later, Kylo Ren's uniforms owe a clear debt to samurai *kabuto* (helmets).

For much of the late 20th century, the mystique of the warrior held sway primarily outside Japan, but, in the past few decades, this 'global samurai' has been re-imported into its country of origin, where, says Dr Buckland, 'it's incredibly useful to drive tourism'. Even the word samurai has been (re)introduced, 'but it's written in the script that they use for foreign words'.

Yet, today's samurai are not solely a piece of cultural heritage or a tourist attraction—descendants of those elite families still live in contemporary Japan. Some have wealth, some have held on to their ancestors' collections, some have helped rebuild lost castles and many have remained invested in the areas of the country they were associated with during the feudal period: 'I went to a re-enactment in the Fukushima region, where a descendant of a former *daimyo* turned up to play the role of *daimyo*,' recalls Dr Buckland. To paraphrase a different global symbol of the 20th century, *The Lord of the Rings*, history became legend and legend became meta.

'Samurai' is at the British Museum, London WC1, from February 3–May 4 (www.britishmuseum.org)

The teenage diplomat

It must have been the adventure of a lifetime for a barely teenaged boy. In 1582, when he was only 13, Itō Mancio, the grandson of a powerful lord who converted to Christianity, led a Japanese delegation to the Vatican. After a long journey via Goa, Lisbon and Madrid (where he was received by Philip II of Spain), he reached Rome in March 1585. He met the ailing Gregory XIII and attended the coronation of successor, Sixtus V, who made Ito a Knight of the Golden Spur. On his way back home, the young samurai had his portrait (*right*) painted in Venice by Domenico Tintoretto (now on show at the British Museum's 'Samurai' exhibition). He eventually made it back to Japan in 1590 and became a Jesuit priest.

WEIRD & WONDERFUL

THERE is something reminiscent of Laura Ellen Bacon's willow art in the work of Britain-based Japanese artist Kazuhito Takadoi. With a background in horticultural studies, he draws inspiration from Nature to weave, sew and tie dried grasses, leaves and twigs from his own garden into sculptures. His materials are left undyed, bringing the play of light and shadow to the fore. A particularly striking example, his *WA (Loop)* (*right*), is on show at the forthcoming Collect Fair (February 27–March 1; www.collectartfair.com).

The Trustees of the British Museum; John Bigelow Taylor; Alamy; Philippe Biolatto, Ville d'Aix en Provence/DACS; Courtesy YMT

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Humble, grumble, toil and scumble

From George Stubbs's golden vision of the labourer's place in society to Ford Madox Brown's heroically monumental celebration of manual labour, artists gave individual interpretations of work, as **Michael Hall** reveals

Preceding pages: **The message of Prussian industrial might is hammered home in Adolph Menzel's monumental 5ft by 8ft canvas, *The Iron Rolling Mill (Modern Cyclopes)*, 1872–75.** *Above:* **Precision task: Laura Knight conveys the technical skill involved in manufacturing a Second World War Bofors anti-aircraft gun in *Ruth Loftus Screwing a Breech-Ring*, 1943**

THAT all-too-familiar nine-to-five feeling goes back to the beginning of human civilisation, as far back as the expulsion from Eden, if Genesis is to be believed. Jehovah's words to Adam after the Fall—'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground'—are the basis for the traditional belief that work is both a lifelong curse and a destiny imposed by God. For many centuries, artists who depicted workmen would probably have had Adam with his spade and Eve with her spinning wheel at the backs of their mind—but when did work come in itself to be regarded as a fit subject for art? Scenes of working life form a background to events in the Christian narrative, from the shepherds tending their flocks at the Nativity to Jesus summoning fishermen on the Sea of Galilee to be his apostles. However, it was not until the later Middle Ages that artists focused on working people without any reference to a larger narrative.

Christians were helped to remember the dates of the feast days of the liturgical year by the inclusion of calendar pages in their devotional books. From late antiquity onwards, these were often embellished with the signs of the zodiac to mark the passage of the year. By the 12th century, it began to be common for the signs to be linked to the labours of the months—in March, Aries was accompanied by a scene of people pruning and July saw Leo paired with labourers reaping corn. By the beginning of the 15th century, most famously in the illuminations to the great Netherlandish manuscript known as the *Très Riches Heures*, made for Jean, duc de Berry, these scenes were developed into detailed depictions of contemporary men and women at work in carefully observed landscapes.

> 'There was a vogue for scenes of agricultural labour in mid-Georgian Britain'

The labours were almost exclusively agricultural in nature, partly because they were tied to the seasons set out in the calendars, but also because for most people in medieval Europe work meant labour on the land. It is not surprising, therefore, that scenes of ordinary people at work first became a genre in its own right, divorced from the liturgical calendar, in the urban setting of the towns and cities of the Protestant Netherlands. A fashion developed in mid-17th-century Dutch art for sets of portraits of craftsmen—idealised figures, rather than portraits—such as knife grinders, blacksmiths and barbers, which may perhaps reflect the increasingly rigid organisation of such trades into guilds. These figures were so popular that some painters began to specialise in scenes of workshops. Among them was the Leiden artist Quiringh van Brekelenkam (about 1622–about 1669), who in such typical works as *The Cobbler* shows a well-ordered, but not obviously idealised room that doubles as a workshop and domestic space, with a client leaning through the window, perhaps waiting for the cobbler to finish mending his shoe, as the latter's wife prepares the day's meal.

The popularity of such works encouraged people to look at real workmen with more

A long time in the pipeline: navvies dig a trench for water pipes in Ford Madox Brown's *Work*, an 11-year travail the artist started in 1852

appreciative eyes. A century later, in the mid 1760s, George Byng, Viscount Torrington, was watching bricklayers at work on his Southill estate in Bedfordshire when he was struck by their resemblance to 'a Flemish subject'—he almost certainly had Dutch paintings in mind. He commissioned George Stubbs (1724–1806) to paint a set of three canvases depicting his employees working at Southill, including grooms and a gamekeeper, as well as labourers. He chose his artist well, as Stubbs was a masterly painter of rural labour, most famously in his pair of canvases *Haymakers* and *Reapers*, made in 1785 and both now at Tate Britain.

There was a vogue for scenes of agricultural labour in mid-Georgian Britain, stimulated in part by the immense popularity of James Thomson's series of four poems *The Seasons* (1726–30). Although the paintings are idealised—Stubbs conveys little sense of sweat or muscular exhaustion—the impression they give of a contented hierarchical society also honours the workmen and women who provide its food. The well-dressed figures, notably the standing woman in *Haymakers* boldly facing us with her rake, are individuals and, although anonymous, must surely be based on life studies.

Stubbs's golden vision of the labourer's place in a well-ordered society that seems to have changed little since the days of the medieval calendars was upended only four years later by revolution in France. The abolition of the monarchy, aristocracy and clergy and the elevation of the ordinary working man to the pinnacle of the social hierarchy—in ideological terms, at least—had a major impact on artists. French painters were the first who sought to celebrate in a realistic way the new status of manual labour. The most influential artist in this radical genre was Jean-François Millet (1814–75). It is hard now to grasp how disconcerting many contemporaries found such works as *The Wood Sawyers* (1850–52), where the dominant figure is a man whose straining thighs and buttocks are thrust out towards the viewer. To many critics, such paintings were unpalatably coarse in their lack of idealisation, but others—most →

Our work is never done: Edward Hopper's modern-day Adam and Eve are condemned to eternal labour in *Office at Night*, 1940

famously Vincent van Gogh—admired the heroic monumentality of Millet's depictions of manual toil.

Perhaps the best-known 19th-century celebration of such labour is, however, English. In 1852, the Pre-Raphaelite painter Ford Madox Brown (1821–93) began work on a painting of navvies digging a trench for water pipes in Hampstead. He took 11 years to complete it—a great labour in itself—before exhibiting it in 1865 under the title *Work*. The simplicity of the name was complicated by the Biblical texts Brown inscribed on the frame, which include the lines from Genesis with which this article began. The central figure, described by Brown as 'the young navvy in the pride of manly health and beauty', is posed with the authority of a classical statue and although

> 'French painters were the first who sought to celebrate in a realistic way the new status of manual labour'

Brown wrote that he set the scene in July to emphasise the toil of working outdoors in the heat, the golden light that bathes the workmen might also signify divine favour. Scenes of manual labour were often celebrations of heroic masculinity, a quality that Brown emphasises by contrasting the powerful figures of the navvies with the slatternly girl in the foreground and the effeminate flower seller, who slinks along the wall at the far left.

By the time that Brown's painting was first shown in public, an increasing number of workers saw little of the sun during their working day as they were confined to factories. In 1872, the Prussian artist Adolph Menzel (1815–1905) conceived the idea of a monumental canvas depicting an iron-rolling mill, which he based on detailed studies of ironworks at Königshütte in Upper Silesia, now in Poland. Shown at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, France, in 1878, it has been acclaimed as the first great factory scene in European art. In fact, there were precedents—an English viewer might

Alamy; Bridgeman Images; 2026 Heirs of Josephine Hopper/Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS) NY/DACS, London

Many hands make light work in George Stubbs's *Haymakers*, with *Reapers*, one of a pair of agricultural scenes the artist painted in 1785

think of Joseph Wright of Derby's industrial forges or William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal: The Nineteenth Century*, a mural at Wallington Hall, Northumberland, painted in 1861. Menzel was, however, one of the first painters to convey the terrifying scale of 19th-century industry, to which he gave a nationalist twist. Previously best known for canvases on the life of Frederick the Great, he recognised that Prussian industrial achievements honoured the Hohenzollerns no less than scenes of historic military triumphs.

Although Menzel shows the workers as almost overwhelmed by the scale of their setting, they are recognisably the same sort of heroic men that Millet and Brown depicted. Women, who traditionally were painted at work only in their homes or in the fields, had to wait until the 20th century before they, too, were represented in scenes of industrial labour, a change that owed as much to war as it did to feminism. During the Second World War, Laura Knight (1877–1970), until then best known for ballet and circus scenes, was employed by the War Artists' Advisory Committee, an association that led to her becoming Britain's official artist at the Nuremberg trials. Her most celebrated wartime canvas is *Ruby Loftus Screwing a Breech-Ring*, painted in 1943, which shows Loftus at work on a lathe in the Royal Ordnance factory in Newport, Wales, demonstrating her mastery of the highly technical skill of making a breech ring for a Bofors anti-aircraft gun. Knight matched the precision of Loftus's task with the careful detail of the portrait, which was praised for its accurate depiction of the manufacturing process. Her experience with dancers must have prepared her for the task of painting a figure engaged in complex manual labour.

Compared with men working with muscular energy or women in control of delicate machinery, the offices in which most people work today offer much less interesting material for artists. This very lack of excitement was perhaps what drew Edward Hopper (1882–1967) to paint *Office at Night* in 1940, during a period when he was producing his best-known scenes of urban loneliness, such as *Nighthawks* (1942). As so often in Hopper's art, one wonders if there is an unrevealed narrative behind the figures of the man at his desk and the woman standing at a filing cabinet, but perhaps they are simply a modern Adam and Eve, pondering God's condemnation of humanity to eternal labour.

Happy while you work

Artists always had one scene of working life readily to hand—their own studios or workshops. Among the earliest known depictions of a craftsman at work is this sketch made on a broken piece of pottery in 19th-dynasty Egypt (1295BC–1186BC). Now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, it shows a stonemason working with his chisel. The artist, probably one of his colleagues, has captured such details as the man's stubbly chin. With his head thrown back and his mouth open, this burly mason is probably singing.

Huon Mallalieu

Fig 1: **A pair of rare Gonse armchairs by Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann. $1.575 million**

In the hot seat

A pair of comfortable Gonse chairs brought last year's sales to a splendid end, with Old Master drawings set to star at auctions and fairs early in 2026

IN a fantasy world, the opening months of 2026 would offer collectors of Old Master drawings everything they could dream of acquiring if there were a Leonardo, a Raphael and a Dürer, but, even so, a Michelangelo, Rembrandt and Hans Baldung Grien come pretty close, especially with the addition of a Rubens preparatory oil study currently at BRAFA (*see Pick of the week*).

The 4½in by 6in Rembrandt chalk-and-wash study *Young Lion Resting* **(*Fig 2*)**, the only one that is not a new discovery, will be auctioned on February 4 at Sotheby's New York (estimate to $20 million), the 5¼in by 4½in red-chalk study of a foot by Michelangelo **(*Fig 3*)** at Christie's New York on the following day (estimate to $2 million). The foot was unknown until a photograph was sent to Christie's, where it was identified as a study for the Libyan Sybil in the Sistine Chapel. The 6in by 4in silverpoint *Portrait of Susanna Pfeffinger* **(*Fig 4*)** by Grien (1484/85–1545) will come up with Beaussant Lefèvre in collaboration with Cabinet de Bayser at Drouot in Paris on March 23, coinciding with this year's Salon du Dessin (March 25–30). It is remarkable not only for quality and rarity, but because the sitter's name and dates (1465–1538) are known. It has never before left her family (estimate to €3 million).

A last backward glance to 2025 reminds me of the value of old-fashioned physical viewing before bidding at auction, illustrated by two lots in an online Important Design session at Sotheby's New York at the end of last year. These were beds from the collections of the late Mrs Karpidas (*Art market, October 15, 2025*) by the Swiss-born Paris-based designer Mattia Bonetti (b. 1952). To the eye informed only by the online cataloguing, as mine was, there was little to choose between them. The base of the first measured 78½ in by 70in, that of the second 77½in by 78in and the headboards, actually groupings of upholstered cushions, differed by a couple of square inches. One other slight difference was that supports raised the second two inches from the floor, but that, as those able to view in person might have understood, would not have made it any less awkward for an ageing sleeper to get up of a morning. However, there must have been something more than those stray inches to result in the prices of $19,050 **(*Fig 7*)** and $66,040 **(*Fig 6*)** against equal estimates of up to $7,000. Perhaps there was an overlooked gold ingot behind the second bed's bolster.

The highlights of the October session from the Karpidas Collection in London had been dominated by works by Claude and François-Xavier Lalanne, 'Les Lalannes', of whom she was an early and important patron. This time

Fig 2 left: ***Young Lion Resting*** **by Rembrandt. Estimate $15 million–$20 million.** *Fig 3 centre:* **A Michelangelo study for the Sistine Chapel. Estimate $1.5 million–$2 million.** *Fig 4 right:* **Hans Baldung Grien's *Portrait of Susanna Pfeffinger*. Estimate €1.5 million–€3 million**

Fig 5 right: **Hippopotame Bar by François-Xavier Lalanne. $31.43 million**

Fig 6 above: **A Mattia Bonetti-designed bed. $66.040.** *Fig 7 left:* **A second bed by the Paris-based Swiss designer. $19,050**

in the New York sale there were more Lalannes, but from another enthusiastic patron, the late Anne Schlumberger, a French oil company heiress and philanthropist. Like the Manchester-born Mrs Karpidas, she spent much time in Greece, where she funded libraries for rural children. In the south of France, in an irenic location where she had inherited land between the Massif de l'Esterel and the Montagne Sainte-Victoire, she established the Fondation des Treilles, where artists, musicians, thinkers and writers attend seminars or can stay and work undisturbed for a few weeks at a time. Since 2017, there has also been the Académie de la Voix to support young professional singers.

Until this sale, François-Xavier's highest price had been £13.7 million in 2023 paid at Christie's, Paris, for *Rhinocrétaire I*, a metal sculpture where flaps opened to reveal a fully functional desk. That was left far behind by the $31.43 million (£23.480 million) achieved by Mrs Schlumberger's 1976 *Hippopotame Bar, pièce unique* **(*Fig 5*)**, created in welded sheets of copper by the artist, which was the prototype of a famous series produced in a mixture of cast metals and painted wood. One of those has sold for $6.25 million (£5 million), also in 2023. This unique first version was accompanied by drawings and documents for the commission. Sotheby's rightly noted that: 'Beyond its sculptural brilliance, the "Hippopotamus Bar" is a masterwork of functional whimsy.' The tongue, for instance, serves as a bracket to hold the mouth open with a tray for *hors-d'oeuvres* and the stomach contains a revolving basin for bottles and ice.

From an anonymous American collection came another lot that was a highlight of this sale, a pair of very comfortable-looking 'Gonse' armchairs **(*Fig 1*)** by Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann (1879–1933), probably the most important French Art Deco furniture designer. Although not realised until about 1930, these originated in drawings made during the First World War, as did many of his seminal ideas, when illness kept him out of the fighting. His father had run a decorating business, which he inherited, but, in 1919, he launched his own partnership and in 1925 he was a star of the exhibition from which Art Deco took its name. Ruhlmann's materials were expensive, in this case macassar ebony, and he controlled all aspects of creation, insisting that his team kept rigidly to his drawings. Despite his reputation, it was not easy to make the business pay by these methods and his clients had to be rich.

Several architects numbered among them, one being Emmanuel Gonse (1880–1954), for whom these chairs were made. He was the son of Louis Gonze, the art historian and curator who had made Japonisme the fashion in Belle Époque France, but his uncle, Gen Arthur Gonse, left a less attractive memory as a persecutor of Capt Dreyfuss. A few more Gonse chairs were made at about the time of Ruhlmann's death, but only three had appeared on the market before this pair, which sold well above estimate at $1.575 million (£1.177 million). During the 1980s, they had belonged to the restaurateur Michael Chow of the Mr Chow chain, who has been described as an obsessive collector of modern furniture and contemporary art.

Next week **Heartening news for oak**

Pick of the week

Three years ago, the *Head of an Old Man* (*above*) in oil paint on paper was bought unattributed at auction by Klaas Muller, chairman of BRAFA, who is a confessed 'Rubens addict' and has identified it as a study for a painting of St Thomas. Furthermore, if turned upside down, an overpainted face of a woman appears through the Apostle's beard.

The tragedy then the triumph

Verdi's dramatic operas are among the most popular, but grief nearly halted his output and the Italian composer and countryman only returned to creativity after finding solace on his farm, reports **Henrietta Bredin**

GIUSEPPE VERDI, who died 125 years ago this week, is one of those composers, like Brahms, whose later portrait photographs are so familiar—bearded, grizzled and elderly—that it is easy to forget he was once a dark-haired, vigorous young man, bursting with energy and ambition.

He was a country boy from the small, north Italian village of Le Roncole, where his parents, keen for him to gain as good an education as possible, saved up to buy him a spinet. He sang in the church choir and learnt to play the organ, so successfully that he became the official, paid organist at the age of eight. By 13, it was clear that music would be his future and he was taken up by the local Philharmonic Society, under whose auspices he produced what he later referred to as 'a motley assortment of pieces': hundreds of marches and little sinfonie, five or six concertos, variations for pianoforte, serenades, cantatas, arias, duets, trios and church music.

Despite failing to get a place at the Milan Conservatoire—he had his sights set on Milan and its great opera house, La Scala—Verdi headed for the city with his young wife, Margherita, daughter of Antonio Barezzi, his chief patron at the Philharmonic Society. There, he took private lessons with the support of his father-in-law, heard as many operas as he could, by Rossini, Donizetti →

Love story: written in 1871 for the soprano Teresa Stolz, Verdi's *Aida* is a spectacular sight at the Sydney Opera House, Australia

Walking on water: Verdi's *Rigoletto*, based on Victor Hugo's *Le roi s'amuse*, lights up the lake stage at the Bregenz Festival in Austria

and Bellini, made useful musical connections, gave singing and piano lessons and eventually got work as a rehearsal pianist and conductor.

Opera was what took hold. Over a period of four years, and many drafts and reworkings, he wrote his first, *Oberto*, which was performed at La Scala in 1839, was sufficiently popular to merit a run of 13 performances and resulted in a contract for three more works. It looked as if the composer was well on his way, but only a year later, having produced his second opera, *Un giorno di regno* (*King for a Day*), Verdi suffered the tragic loss of his 26-year-old wife to encephalitis, their two little children, Virginia and Romano, having died the year before. It was an appalling stroke of fate, from which he struggled to recover. The opera, a comedy, was a resounding flop, and Verdi vowed to give up composing altogether.

Slowly, with the encouragement of friends and colleagues, and the solace of his farm (*see box*), he turned back to composition and, by the autumn of 1841, had produced *Nabucco*. It was first performed at La Scala in 1842 and was an immediate, enormous success. The 16 years that followed were referred to by Verdi as his 'years in the galleys', when he 'never had one hour of peace', writing 20 operas back to back, including many of the works for which he is best known today, for theatres all over Italy and in Paris. He never attempted comedy again, until his very last opera, the joyously life-affirming *Falstaff*—as he said, 'here a note, there a whole phrase, little by little'.

However grand the setting, Verdi's concerns and characters were intensely and vulnerably human. In *Don Carlos*, his Philip II of Spain, struggling with the heavy burdens of kingship and troubled by the erratic behaviour of Carlos, his son and heir, is a sharply recognisable type, a man of power with vast responsibilities who is privately unreliable and publicly both uxorious and mendacious.

Despite rumours of a baby with his mistress, later wife, the soprano Giuseppina Strepponi, Verdi never had another child. However, he and Giuseppina adopted his seven-year-old cousin, Filomena Maria, and brought her up

Getty; Alamy

Verdi's *La forza del destino*, first performed in November 1862

Verdi's life off and on stage

1813 Born on October 9 or 10 to an innkeeper and spinner

1836 Marries his patron's daughter, Margherita Barezzi

1839 Composes first opera, *Oberto*, and is offered a contract by La Scala; both his children die

1840 Margherita dies; *Un giorno di regno* is booed off stage

1841 Composes *Nabucco*, which proves an international sensation; *Va, Pensiero*, the chorus of the Hebrew slaves, becomes an unofficial national anthem for decades

1844 Buys land for his retirement

1847 Composes *Macbeth*; falls in love with Giuseppina Strepponi

1851 Composes *Rigoletto*

1853 Composes *Il trovatore* and *La traviata*

1859 Becomes a politician and marries Strepponi

as their own. A relationship that comes up over and again in Verdi's operas is that of father and daughter. There is a father who finds his daughter a handful: Ford and Nannetta in *Falstaff*; a father so fearful for his adored daughter that he hides her away, only for her to fall prey to the first amoral seducer who comes along: Rigoletto and Gilda; one who loses his daughter, then finds her as a grown woman: Simon Boccanegra and Amelia; and the man who bullies his daughter into putting her country before her lover: Ramfis and Aida.

> 'Verdi's characters were intensely and vulnerably human'

Then there is Germont, who tries to protect his son Alfredo from the woman he considers to be a whore and a spendthrift: Violetta in *La traviata*. He tells her that he is trying to protect his own young and innocent daughter (who does not appear in the opera) and ends up convinced of Violetta's loving self-sacrifice, coming to cherish her (too late) as might a true and understanding father.

Finally, there is the father with three daughters in the opera that Verdi longed to write but never did, although it preoccupied him for decades—*King Lear*. What would he have done with that fatally foolish stubborn man, the painfully honest Cordelia and those two monsters, Goneril and Regan?

March 25–April 23 'Rigoletto' at Royal Opera House, WC2 (www.rbo.org.uk); May 27–July 24 'La traviata' at Garsington Opera, Buckinghamshire (www.garsingtonopera.org); July 1–16 'Macbeth' at Longborough Opera, Gloucestershire (www.lfo.org.uk); June 6–July 7 'Don Carlos' at Grange Park Opera, Surrey (www.grangeparkopera.co.uk)

Parallel lives

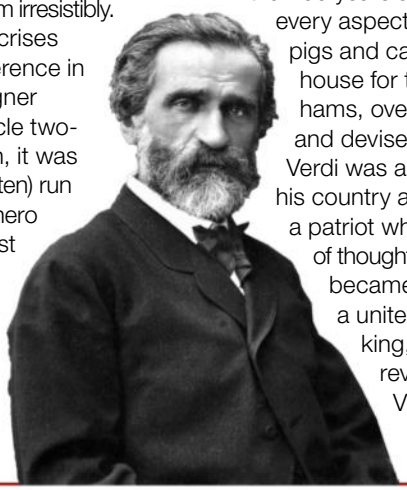
For the two great composers of their time, Verdi and Richard Wagner, both born in 1813, the operatic form was to become by far the major component of their musical output (Verdi wrote 26, Wagner 13). However, they never met and their characters and their preferred subject matter could hardly have been more different.

Both men read widely and were inspired by the plays of Shakespeare, but Wagner elected to write his own texts, plunging headlong into German and Norse mythology, whereas Verdi collaborated with a series of brilliant librettists (with whom he was ferociously demanding), including Francesco Maria Piave, who was responsible for *Macbeth*, and Arrigo Boito, who crafted *Otello* and *Falstaff,* cleverly drawing on *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for the latter. Verdi also wrote operas based on French, Spanish and German novels and plays by Alexandre Dumas fils (*La traviata*), Victor Hugo (*Rigoletto*), Friedrich Schiller (*Don Carlos*) and Antonio Garcia Gutiérrez (*Simon Boccanegra*).

Both men both suffered shattering crises of faith in their ability to keep composing, but music welled up in them irresistibly. Their reactions to these crises shows the essential difference in their natures. When Wagner abandoned the Ring Cycle two-thirds of the way through, it was because he had (as so often) run out of money. He left his hero Siegfried in a forest, almost as a hostage to fortune, until someone, somewhere, paid a ransom to his creator, enabling him to carry on in the comfortable, affluent circumstances he considered to be his due.

Wagner overcame money worries to complete his abandoned Ring Cycle

Verdi had run out of inspiration and faith in himself after the deaths of his family and the failure of *Un giorno di regno*, but his route to recovery was by hard physical work. He came from the land and he went back to it, working in the fields at Sant'Agata, north-west of Parma, where he lived for more than 50 years and was familiar with every aspect of the estate. He kept pigs and cattle, built a slaughter-house for the pigs to produce hams, oversaw the farm workers and devised an irrigation system. Verdi was a man who loved both his country and the countryside, a patriot who believed in freedom of thought and whose own name became, in the struggle for a united Italy under a new king, an acrostic for the revolutionaries: VIVA VERDI (Long Live Vittorio Emanuele Re D'Italia).



Physical work helped Verdi deal with the loss of his wife and children

Bryn Terfel's Sir John Falstaff

1861 Elected to Parliament in the year of the unification of Italy

1862 *La forza del destino*, commissioned by the Imperial Theatre of St Petersburg in Russia, is first performed

1867 Composes *Don Carlos*

1871 Creates *Aida* for the soprano Teresa Stolz, with whom Verdi was in love

1874 Composes the evocative *Requiem Mass* in honour of the poet Alessandro Manzoni

1879 Is elected to the Italian senate

1881 Declares *Otello* his last opera

1893 *Falstaff*, his actual last opera, is performed at La Scala

1896 Founds the Casa di Riposo per Musicisti (rest home for musicians), where he is later buried, writing to a friend: 'Of all my works, that which pleases me most is the Casa that I had built in Milan to shelter elderly singers who have not been favoured by fortune'

1897 Strepponi dies

1898 *Four Sacred Pieces*, his last major work, is performed by Paris Opera

1901 Dies on January 27 from a stroke. Thousands line the streets of Milan for his funeral, the largest public assembly in Italy, at which fellow composer Toscanini conducts the massed orchestras and choirs *KG*

Michael Billington

Woman on the verge of a nervous breakdown

There are welcome revivals of Ayckbourn and Stoppard plays, plus a brilliant production of a Western classic

Mind games: Romesh Ranganathan as Bill and Sheridan Smith as Susan revive Sir Alan Ayckbourn's timeless classic *Woman in Mind*

TIME was when there was always a play by Sir Alan Ayckbourn running in London's West End. Now, they are rare events, which is why it is a joy to see *Woman in Mind*, which premiered in 1985, installed at the Duke of York's, WC2. I have some reservations about Michael Longhurst's production, but none about the play, which remains unnervingly timeless.

What is unusual for a male playwright is that the action is seen entirely through female eyes. In this case, it is suburban Susan who, after a blow on the head from a garden rake, hallucinates about a fantasy family. In the real world, her husband is an unfeeling vicar absorbed in writing a potted history of the parish, her sister-in-law suffers from a sense of martyrdom and her largely absent son is part of a community that forbids him to speak to his family. Driven to despair by her surroundings, Susan escapes into an idealised romantic idyll.

It is clearly a play about a woman in the throes of a nervous breakdown. It is also, in part, a play about Susan's lack of religious solace: her clerical husband, her psychic sister-in-law and her sectarian son all represent, in different ways, the world of the spirit. What makes it uniquely Ayckbournian is that it is both funny and tragic at the same time. In Mr Longhurst's production, potential laugh lines—such as Susan's revelation that sex, like gardening, is something she now has to do on her own—are skated over.

Good as Sheridan Smith is, she lacks that next-door-neighbour ordinariness that is the key to Susan: Miss Smith radiates a perky vitality and a sexual magnetism in a role that requires a repression of exactly those qualities. There are, however, two excellent performances. Tim McMullan is perfect as Susan's insensitive husband, squirming uncomfortably in his chair at the mere mention of physical contact, and Louise Brealey is marvellous as the sister-in-law who wears a permanent look of vindictive outrage. A comedian by profession, Romesh Ranganathan gives a perfectly decent performance as Susan's attentive, but ultimately ineffectual doctor. Even if I can imagine better productions, I still think this is an astonishing play that anticipated our increased awareness of nervous disorders and, more specifically, what women have to endure.

I had a somewhat different reaction to *High Noon* at the Harold Pinter Theatre, SW1: this is a brilliant production of a so-so play. That may seem a churlish comment on Eric Roth's faithful adaptation of Carl Foreman's script for the famous 1952 film, the one in which

Marc Brenner; Johan Persson

Gary Cooper played a steadfast marshal who puts his duty to protect the community from a killer above his marriage to Grace Kelly. At the time, the marshal's abandonment by his friends was seen as a comment on the consequences of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Today, the marshal's statement that 'Without rules there is chaos' looks topical for a very different reason. However, the marshal's implacable argument that 'I don't have a choice' when urged to get out of town stifles the drama; plays are at their best when protagonists are impaled on the horns of a dilemma.

That said, everything about Thea Sharrock's production is terrific. Billy Crudup exudes just the right flinty integrity as the obdurate marshal, Denise Gough endows his Quaker bride with far more fire and spirit than we saw in the film and there is fine back-up from Billy Howle as the marshal's ambitious deputy and Rosa Salazar as a Mexican saloon-owner. Tim Hatley's design, dominated by a suspended clock marking the countdown to noon, and Neil Austin's lighting, allowing sunshine to filter apologetically through the wooden slats of the clapboard set, intensify the sense of impending doom. I'm not sure that the songs, three of them by Bruce Springsteen, add that much, but this is still a highly impressive production.

The revival of Sir Tom Stoppard's *Indian Ink* at Hampstead Theatre came shortly after the playwright's death and was inevitably overshadowed by that event. However, even if this 1995 play is hardly major Stoppard, it nevertheless shows his ability to juxtapose contrasting worlds. Set partly in 1930s India and partly in 1980s England, the play confronts colonialism and nationalism, artists and biographers, Indian Anglophilia and the British passion for everything Indian. The play is also a hymn to its free-spirited heroine, who is outspoken, poetic and amatory. The role is played with great gusto by Ruby Ashbourne Serkis, but was originally written for Felicity Kendal, who now movingly appears as the heroine's grieving sister.

Moving return: Felicity Kendal is back in *Indian Ink* as Mrs Swan, having played the lead role in the original 1995 production

Denise Gough as Amy Fowler and Billy Crudup as Will Kane steal the show in *High Noon*

> 'Indian Ink is a hymn to its free-spirited heroine, who is outspoken, poetic and amatory'

J. M. Synge's tragicomic masterpiece, *The Playboy of the Western World*, has arrived at the National's Lyttelton Theatre, SE1, in a production by Caitriona McLaughlin from the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. To be honest, it took me time to tune in to the authentic Irish accents, but the abiding image of this production is of the loneliness of life in Co Mayo where women may be idealised, but are rarely loved and where many end up as mourning widows. I still carry memories of the great Siobhán McKenna as Pegeen Mike, which Nicola Coughlan here does nothing to displace, but Siobhán McSweeney is superb as the Widow Quin who becomes a sly predator rivalling Pegeen in her love for the falsely heroic playboy.

Among the shows that opened before Christmas whose run has come to an end, Sheridan's *The Rivals* was the Orange Tree, Richmond's (TW9) latest excursion into 18th-century comedy after a successful revival of Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*. Tom Littler here updated Sheridan's story of assumed identities and misdirected passions to Bath in the 1920s and elicited strong performances from Robert Bathurst as an apoplectic Sir Anthony Absolute, Patricia Hodge as an earnest Mrs Malaprop and Zoe Brough as an enticing Lydia Languish. Like the rest of the audience, I had a good time as I wondered how often disagreements were resolved by duels in a 1920s Bath full of flappers and jazz.

Lastly, a fond farewell to the recently departed RSC *Twelfth Night*, which arrived at the Barbican, EC2, from Stratford-upon-Avon, where it proved a big hit. The production by Prasanna Puwanarajah tended to treat the play's comedy and sadness as separate ingredients rather than interweave them, but two performances made this revival worth seeing. Samuel West's Malvolio was a repressed household official seething with lust and class envy and Michael Grady-Hall was a Stan Laurel-like Feste, who delivered that final song about the wind and the rain with an exquisite melancholy that still penetrates the memory.

'Woman in Mind' until February 28, then touring (0844 871 7623); 'High Noon' until March 6 (0333 009 6690); 'Indian Ink' until February 7 (020–7722 9301); 'The Playboy of the Western World' until February 28 (020–3989 5455)

A view through the woods

A Russia of trees and liberty and peace: the forests of Siberia stretch away from the River Chuya, sheltering a people defined by respect

The Oak and The Larch: A Forest History of Russia and its Empires
Sophie Pinkham
(William Collins, £25)

THIS superb book is not, as the title might suggest, a straightforward natural history of Russia's dominant biome, which, as its author reminds us, is equal in importance and far greater in extent than the Amazonian rainforest. Rather, the heart of the work is a portrait of the nation's multitudinous peoples, albeit viewed through the lens of Russian woods and forests.

Befitting such a theme, Sophie Pinkham, a professor of comparative literature at an American university, covers much intellectual and physical territory. She also does important service in one specific sense: she reminds us that, whatever the horrors originating from Moscow's present regime, Russia remains a vibrant source of cultural riches and a region of enormous ethnographic diversity.

As an example of the latter, she opens with a survey of the remarkable Khanty people. They are one of the oldest indigenous groups in Russia, and have a language that shows affinities with Hungarian, Estonian and Finnish. They occupy forests beyond the Ural Mountains around the River Ob and their ancestors may have created some of the earliest urban settlements in human history. Contrary to the old orthodoxy, which insisted that complex society originated with arable farming, the Khanty built fortified communities on resources gathered or hunted from their native forest. Despite centuries of persecution, they still exist. Their resilient culture has no word for wilderness and does not differentiate between wild forest and inhabited settlements. Instead, they observe a reverential silence among their beloved trees to show respect for all of its inhabitants. Imagine how different things might have been if this harmonious creed had been adopted by modern Russia.

> 'Imagine how different things might have been if this creed had been adopted by modern Russia'

We might scoff, but the author shows how the proto-Russian state was deeply preoccupied with these very same forests. Throughout the early modern period, it pursued aggressive policies towards the *khanate* of Siber—the origins of our name Siberia—to gain access to fur-bearing mammals such as sable, beavers and foxes, which became the basis of a centuries-long international fur trade. These economic interests unleashed an inexorable easterly expansion into what Prof Pinkham calls 'a New World for the Russians, a Garden of Eden, blessed with a miraculous bounty'. Since that time, forested places have played complex imaginative roles in the nation's self-image.

A key figure in the story is Tolstoy, who bucked the customary authorial pattern of turning trees into books and, instead, used profits from his great works, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, to buy and plant saplings on his estate at Yasnaya Polyana. This forest-friendly worldview, which he shared with contemporaries such as Vladimir Korolenko (author of *The Murmuring Forest*), projected such places as a kind of spiritual refuge for the Russian people. This was partly because the thousands of rural villages within the forests were home to a huge underclass enslaved by the Tsarist state. Often, the only option for these serfs was to escape the reach of their oppressors by vanishing into the trees. Forest and political liberty were thus inextricably entwined for liberal Russia in the late 19th century.

Once the Bolsheviks took power, however, the new order sought to reset relations between land and people. Trotsky railed against the slovenly realm of forest; the author Gorky, almost an official spokesman for the Soviet state, called Nature a 'blind tyrant' and welcomed wholesale industrial clearance as an assertion of the human will over 'the ancient enemy'. This state-sanctioned antagonism rapidly adapted, especially after the Nazi invasion of 1941, and the Russian people followed their time-honoured tradition of escaping into the woods. These were not mere refugees, sitting out the war by their sylvan camp fires. They became a decisive part of the country's military operations and, by 1942, as the tide slowly turned for the Soviets, the partisans held a region the size of Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands combined.

Prof Pinkham's glorious mix of stories reminds us of the sheer magnitude of her chosen country, not to mention the endless nature of its forests. In turn, with her ability to locate these telling anecdotes, she confirms her mastery over an immense and enthralling history.

Mark Cocker

Getty; Jesse Wilkinson

Be More Bird: Life lessons from a hawk

Candida Meyrick (William Collins, £16.99)

IN today's world, awash with self-help books and every kind of therapy, navel-gazing is encouraged. Learning from a hawk—to look, to react, to wait—is very different. A hawk thinks not of self, but of wind and prey and shadow. For Candida Meyrick, artist, novelist and founder of wellness centre The Retreat New Forest, her route into falconry began with her son, enraptured by a peregrine at a country show. His passion unwaning, the family decide upon the purchase of a Harris hawk, taking years to learn the skills and find the right bird. By chance, the 12-week-old female arrived at the start of lockdown: 'Which is how, when the whole world was grounded, we came to feel entirely free.'

In lyrical chapters, Lady Meyrick reveals the 'deeper magic' of flying Bird (as Sophia Houdini Whitewing is known) near her homes on the edge of the New Forest and in Anglesey: 'And so we trained our miracle bird in the art of being most herself; in other words, most free.' The enduring miracle of falconry is, of course, that the bird comes back to the glove, a bird that even at 12 weeks 'positively radiated danger and power'. Flying Bird, the author must surrender to the superior instincts of the hawk, watching, earthbound, as she spirals upwards, following as best a human can through forests and shaggy fields. At every stage, she learns something, patience from the fallow months when Bird is moulting in her Anglesey mews; trust in leaving a planned route; honesty in killing and eating. A victory over cancer is fresh in her mind and in committing to Bird, who might live 25 years, she is committing to life.

A life-giving partnership: Candida Meyrick and Harris hawk Bird conquer the skies with mutual trust and growing understanding

There are poignant moments of connection, such as when Bird feels threatened by a red kite and Lady Meyrick yells and waves her stick far below. The kite shears off and

> 'The author must surrender to the hawk's superior instincts, watching, earthbound, as she spirals up'

Bird rouses, 'cloak[ed] in confidence and self-assurance'. There are thrills, the perfect day when Bird makes her first kill from the glove; fear when juvenile Bird, buffeted by winds, spends the night in a tree alone; joy when the moult is over and Bird, rejuvenated, soars again. The ancient story of falconry is told, from the Egyptian goddess Isis to Shakespeare and our language. Philosophical, questioning, alive with wonder: this is a book that looks inwards and outwards, learning from the wildest creature with which humans have formed a partnership. Even the cover is a delight.

Octavia Pollock

The Next World War: The New Age of Global Conflict and the Fight to Stop It

Peter Apps (Wildfire, £25)

AT the time of writing, the Chinese are practising war with Taiwan, the Russians are persisting in war crimes in Ukraine, the Middle East continues its 7th-century conflict over the leadership of Islam (the 'Sunni-Shia divide'), with Israel in the middle, and North Korea is defiantly endangering itself and others with its nuclear weapons programme. One could add 'etc, etc'. Peter Apps, a global affairs commentator at Reuters and specialist British Army reservist, spells it all out succinctly in this sequel to his book about NATO, *Deterring Armageddon* (*Books*, *January 31, 2024*). If, however, the title is cataclysmic, the subtitle is more hopeful: we are, indeed, in a new age of global conflict, but war is not inevitable.

This book is not futuristic fiction. The pre-1914 'invasion novels' and more recent works, such as Gen Sir Richard Shirreff's *War with Russia* (2016), warned a sleeping public of the dangers. Today, the danger is all too clear. Having described the fault lines on which war might erupt, and the recent technological developments, the author suggests what it could look like. He is rightly not definitive, for every war is *sui generis*. Although its nature remains much the same, for it is a human activity, its character changes with the physical circumstances. Ukraine has become like 1915, but with drones. Who predicted that? None of the experts whose opinions filled the airways in February 2022.

> 'Ukraine has become like 1915, but with drones. Who predicted that? None of the experts of 2022'

We must not frighten ourselves into fatalistic inactivity, however. Potential aggressors have their problems, too. Thanks to, among other things, her past one-child policy, China's population is shrinking and ageing. Mr Apps says one-quarter of kindergartens has closed in the past five years and quotes the intriguing, but dismal phenomenon of declining piano sales to hyper-ambitious parents, as those of guitars and saxophones to retirees increase. Nor can President Xi be confident that his armed forces are capable of taking Taiwan, for they have no history of success—quite the opposite. He will no doubt have read the Chinese military philosopher Sun Tzu: 'The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.' Xi's greatest chance of annexing the relict of Nationalist China is not by using force, but continuing the threat of it.

Wars usually begin when one side miscalculates the other's resolve. Mr Apps quotes the incoming chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Air Force Gen John Caine, at his Senate confirmation hearing: 'We have to stop admiring the problem and we have to start executing'—in other words, willing the means to deter.

Allan Mallinson

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Bridge Andrew Robson

We return to Herning in Denmark for the coveted Bermuda Bowl. I have to say it: Herning is a really nice place. The streets and pavements are clean and there is seemingly very little crime—most bicycles are not even locked up. I stayed at an Airbnb about 1½ miles from the playing venue—which I much prefer to a hotel these days: you have your own space and do not breathe in the air-conditioned germs of the other guests. And I really like the walk in—being that distance from venue is a plus, not a minus.

I didn't sleep well, however, and struggled to find my A game. It was a case of concentrating 100% and trying to play no worse than my B game. I think I mostly managed that. A win against Belgium in the 23rd and last match of the round-robin would secure us a place in the quarter-finals. This board gave us a huge fillip.

Dealer South
East-West Vulnerable

	♠ KQJ10542 ♥ J10 ♦ AQ9 ♣ 9	
♠ 87 ♥ - ♦ J10832 ♣ K107652	N W E S	♠ A963 ♥ Q64 ♦ K754 ♣ 43
	♠ - ♥ AK987532 ♦ 6 ♣ AQJ8	

South	West	North	East
2♣(1)	Pass	2♠	Pass
3♥	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♥	Pass	4NT(2)	Pass
6♥(3)	Pass	7♥	Dbl(4)
End			

1) Upgrades to the strongest bid.
2) Roman Key Card Blackwood agreeing Hearts.
3) Showing one or three key-cards and a void Spade.
4) East, who has not asked South (his screen-mate) about the meaning of Six Hearts, makes what he is hoping will appear to be a 'palooka-double' of Seven Hearts, holding the Ace of Spades. Actually, he is trying to disguise his Queen-low-low of Hearts—for no one doubles a grand slam with Queen-low-low of Hearts under the strong bid. Also, he does not want his partner fishing out a trump lead (often standard vs a grand slam on grounds of safety).

West led the Knave of Diamonds, declarer winning dummy's Ace and leading the King of Spades, ruffing out East's Ace. The Belgian declarer cashed the Ace of Clubs, ruffed a Club and cashed the Queen of Spades, discarding the Knave of Clubs.

Declarer would have made his doubled grand slam if he'd chanced a third top Spade (West would have discarded to reveal the trump position). That line does not seem right at all, however, and declarer played normally, ruffing a third Diamond and leading the Queen of Clubs. West covered with the King, dummy's ruffed and East overruffed—one down.

We managed to beat Belgium 18-2 and earned a berth in the quarter-finals, finishing the round-robin in seventh place.

Although David Gold and I topped the Butler rankings between the three English pairs, we were far from perfect in that round-robin. Watch us let through this part-score vs Israel.

Dealer South
East-West Vulnerable

	♠ J876 ♥ 7 ♦ 98763 ♣ 654	
♠ AKQ2 ♥ J94 ♦ K5 ♣ QJ108	N W E S	♠ 10943 ♥ 1052 ♦ 1042 ♣ A72
	♠ 5 ♥ AKQ863 ♦ AQJ ♣ K93	

South	West	North	East
1♥	Dbl	Pass	1♠
Dbl(1)	2♠	Pass	Pass
3♥	End		

1) Take-out. One little positive squeak from partner and he'll chance Four Hearts.

West led a top Spade and continued with a second. Declarer ruffed, drew trumps and played Ace-then-Knave of Diamonds. West won the King and led his third top Spade (no other safe exit). Declarer ruffed, cashed the Queen of Diamonds, then exited with the nine of Clubs. West won the ten, but with dummy's Knave of Spades promoted, had to lead a second Club—to East's Ace. Declarer's King of Clubs was his ninth trick—contract made.

Have you spotted West's mistake? He must switch to a Heart at trick two, preserving his two remaining top Spades for later exit cards. Declarer now never scores the King of Clubs—one down.

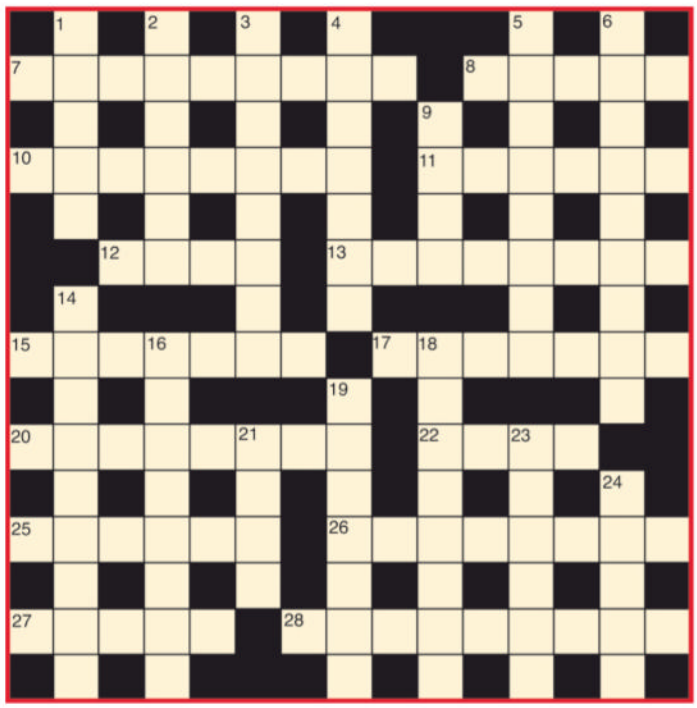
Crossword

A prize of £25 in book tokens will be awarded for the first correct solution opened. Solutions must reach Crossword No 4915, Country Life, 121–141 Westbourne Terrace, Paddington, London, W2 6JR, by **Tuesday, February 3**. UK entrants only

ACROSS
7 Nervous path back around bend to first corner (6,3)
8 Money contract (5)
10 Vicar admitted through devout prior (8)
11 Soft self is clear (6)
12 Tight to return weapons (4)
13 Able to use arithmetic in progression from centre of monument (8)
15 Cold girls in lessons (7)
17 Famous ten spread round to hide deep source (7)
20 Cabal has allocation of gourd (8)
22 Insect to bite back (4)
25 Rodent trapped by drink or cheese (6)
26 Stab in the back reportedly by blade of weapon (8)
27 Guide for me, you and the lady (5)
28 Origins of how pier edges crumble (9)

DOWN
1 Fruit said to plant in ground (5)
2 The Spanish flat number (6)
3 Food in patois of beefy man (8)
4 Here is a gift (7)
5 Fool to stand for office as practice (5,3)
6 Satanists round on helper (9)
9 Mollusc left in river (4)
14 As borstal inappropriate gets bird (9)
16 Shocked when was on top at outset (8)
18 Colour of shrub (8)
19 Fashionable vision in yellow (7)
21 Haunting house of relative (4)
23 Take in first two letters before small brothers turn up (6)
24 Individual to stretch my finances (5)

4915 **TAIT**



SOLUTION TO 4914

ACROSS: 1, Pancake landing; 8, Scaled; 9, Nigella; 12, Item; 13, Sensitised; 15, Dryer; 16, North Sea; 17, Pot; 18, Get ahead; 20, Cured; 23, Antithesis; 24, Able; 26, Inexact; 27, Plaque; 28, Glyceraldehyde. DOWN: 2, Archery; 3, Colt; 4, Kidney; 5, Longshot; 6, Nightstick; 7, Granddaddies; 10, Lists; 11, Biodegrading; 14, Architrave; 16, Nod; 17, Palestra; 19, Tithe; 21, Rebound; 22, Limpid; 25, Oath.

The winner of 4913 is J. Compton, Cardiff

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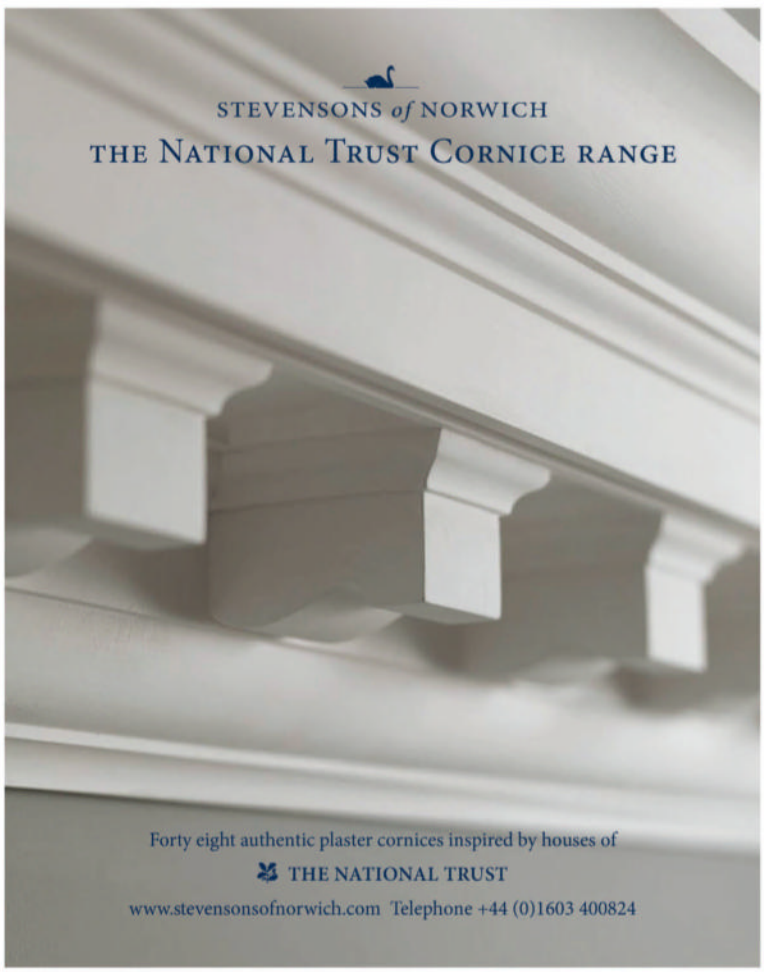
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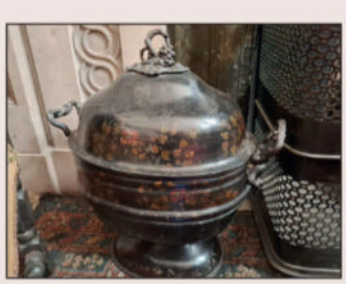

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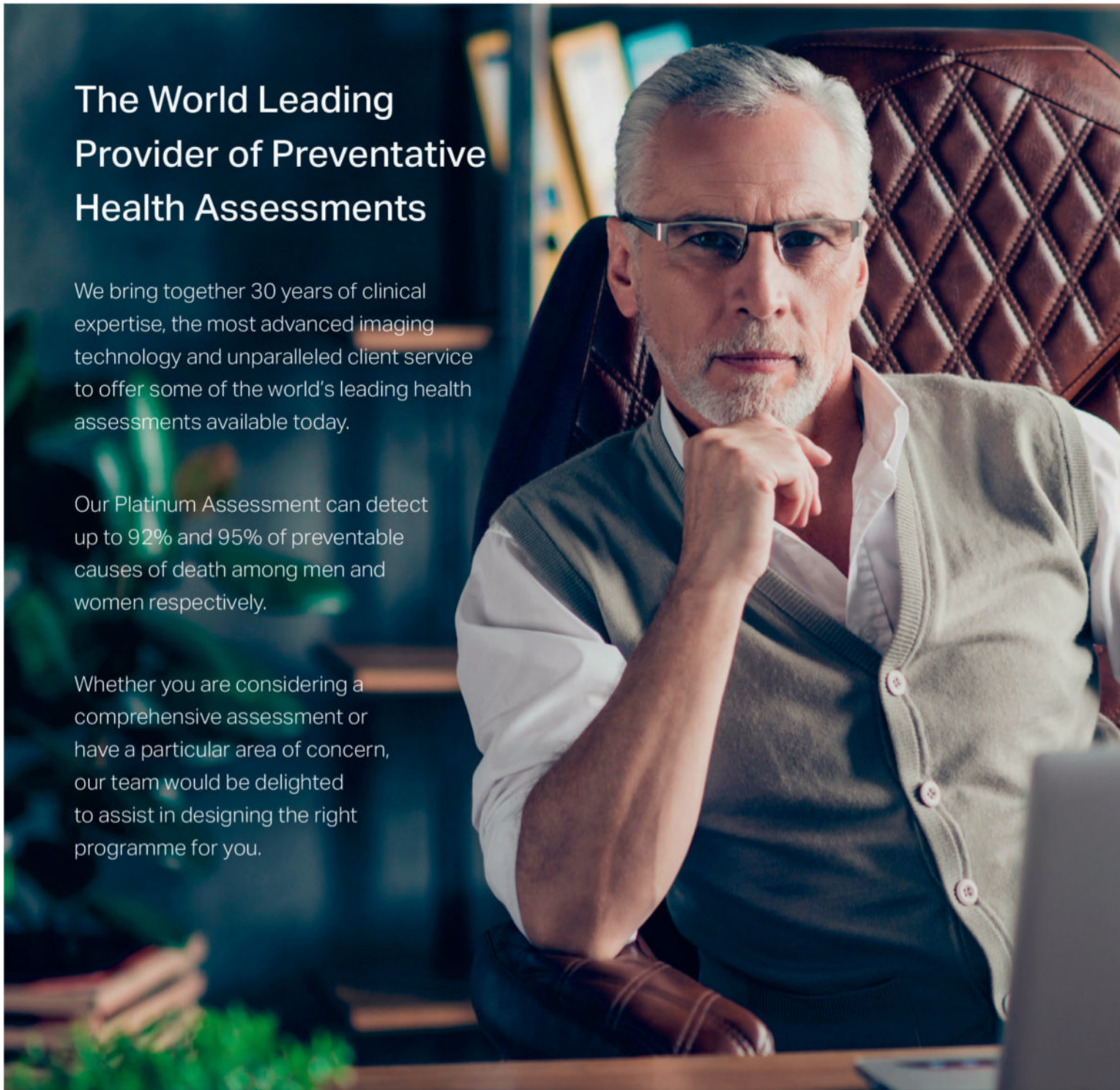

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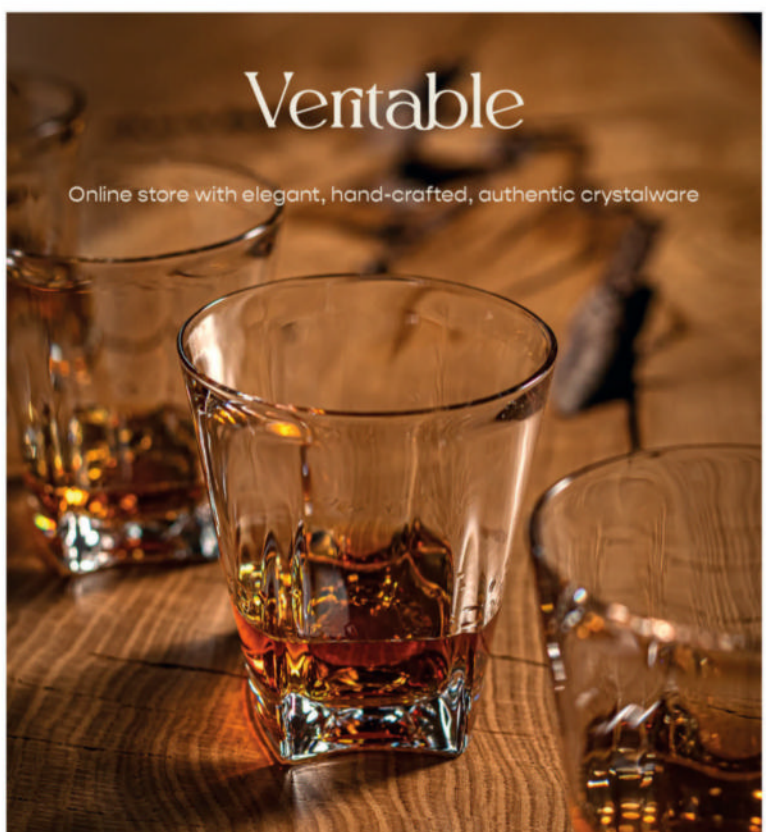

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Jonathan Self

Big Brother and the badgers

I ONCE spent several miserable hours up a tree waiting for some badgers to emerge from their sett. Another time, a house guest obsessed with snails (never invited again) persuaded me to crawl around in a ditch with him collecting specimens. By and large, I take a *laissez-faire* attitude to fauna. I am happy it is there, I am interested to learn about it, but I have no desire to become more intimately acquainted with it. In the manner of Bertie Wooster: 'If I meet a bird, I wave a friendly hand at it, to let it know that I wish it well, but I don't want to crouch behind a bush observing its habits'—or so I would have said.

Oliver's main Christmas present was a Zeiss Secacam 7 Cellular Wildlife Camera—which is, for the uninitiated, a state-of-the-art camera trap. Essentially, you strap the device to a tree (it is camouflaged to look like bark) and whenever something moves past it or it senses the warmth of a body, it takes a photograph and/or starts recording a video. Infrared LED means that it works at night, fancy software allows you to see the images/footage instantly on your mobile phone and, thanks to a miniature solar panel, it never needs batteries.

Of course, I always knew that our farm was home to plenty of wildlife, but I had no idea how much. Oliver has been experimenting with different locations. One night, when the camera was pointed at the stables, it was set off by an unknown feline; as the cat exited stage right, a large rat appeared stage left. Relocated to a thicket on the other side of what we call the home field, the camera captured four rabbits, three foxes, two badgers, a field mouse and what we think was a pygmy shrew in only 90 minutes. We have also witnessed an inept robin trying, without success, to build a nest, and what we are pretty sure was a stoat. Anyway, the whole thing is surprisingly addictive and I frequently find myself longing for the next transmission.

> 'The whole thing is surprisingly addictive. I find myself longing for the next transmission'

Why is it so absorbing? Wild animals and birds are simultaneously like us and unlike us. On the one hand, they are sentient, appear to experience some of the same emotions as humans and are, of course, mortal. On the other hand, their habits, their sense of time, their anatomy and their very wildness make them completely different. It is identifying these similarities and dissimilarities that provides the endless amusement.

The pleasure is, however, tinged with a certain amount of sadness. Around where we live, there are fewer and fewer wild spaces. The remaining patches of temperate woodland, the peat bogs and the ancient hedgerows are all slowly being destroyed. If what Horace promised 2,000 years ago is true—that you may drive out Nature with a pitchfork, but she will keep on coming back—when exactly will she return? As an aside, I find it ironic that as the number and variety of wild animals and birds declines, so the number of household pets increases. Hardly cause and effect, but it is worrying that pets have become the only non-human species most people have direct contact with.

I sometimes wonder, as I peer at my phone, whether the various animals sense that they are being observed. What is the legal position, I muse? When we installed security cameras on the farm, we had to put up signs warning our visitors that they were being recorded. It wouldn't surprise me if, one of these days, I hear from a solicitor acting on behalf of the local fauna.

Next week **Patrick Galbraith**

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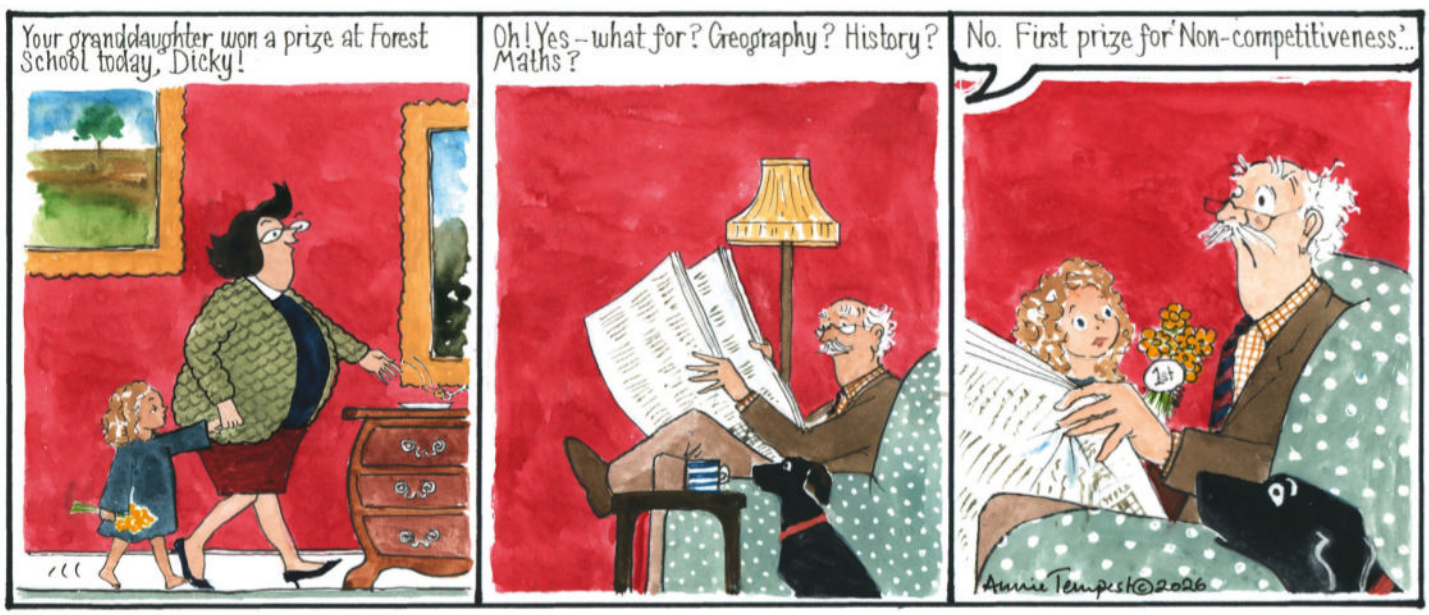
Your granddaughter won a prize at Forest School today, Dicky!
Oh! Yes – what for? Geography? History? Maths?
No. First prize for 'Non-competitiveness'...
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